

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

Sermon: "Life in the Vineyard"

Scripture: John 15:1-17

Rev. Steve Filyk

March 22, 2026

Opener: Savior, like a shepherd lead us 485

Choruses: Living Hope (Wickham), You are the vine

After sermon: Psalm 23

Closer: God of grace and God of glory 490

Imagine you are nearing the end of your life.

Your mind is clear. The people you love are gathered close.

You have a moment—just a moment—

to leave them with what matters most.

What would you say?

Will you tell the younger ones to stay in school?

Will you remind the middle-aged ones to put money away?

Maybe you will urge them to eat their vegetables and wear sunscreen.

Today we have read from the Gospel of John.

Last week, Pastor Harold brought us forward to Jesus' trial before Pilate.

Today, we step back—to the night before his arrest.

Jesus knows that the time has finally come
when he will be put to death by his opponents.

When he will be leaving his followers
and returning to his Father.

In his final moments he offers them

Some parting words to help them prepare for life without him.

And he chooses an image to guide this reflection.

Jesus tells them "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener"

Jesus says "I am the vine; you are the branches."

Jesus asks them to consider themselves part of God's vineyard.

Jesus wasn't inventing a new image.

Bible scholar Tom Wright reminds us that

"Within Jewish tradition, the vine was a picture of Israel.

[The psalmist sang how] God brought a vine out of Egypt,
and planted it in the promised land (Psalm 80:8-18).

It had been ravaged by wild animals and needed protecting a re-establishing.

[The prophet Isaiah declared "The vineyard of Israel...
has borne wild grapes instead of proper ones...]

[And here] Jesus is saying that he is the 'true vine'.

This can only mean that he is, in himself, the true Israel.

His is the one on whom God's purposes are now resting..."

[NT Wright 70]

Jesus uses the image of the vineyard

To describe the organic relationship

He wants to maintain with his disciples

And among the disciples.

The relationship between the vine and the branches

Is one of necessity.

Jesus notes the obvious:

"No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine."

A branch that is disconnected will not receive

The life-giving sap from the vine.

And without that sap they can't be productive.

At the same time every connected vine

Will need to be pruned to remove unproductive growth

And ensure that there is lots of healthy fruit.

And what is the fruit that Jesus is looking for?

Jesus wants the disciples to love each other.

Now just to be clear he isn't simply telling them to 'be nice'

Or 'play fair'.

He wants them to practise the same sort of love

They have witnessed as they travelled with him.

“My command is this [says Jesus]:
Love each other as I have loved you.”

Loving one another doesn't sound complicated—until it is.
It's easy to love people at a distance,
when the stakes are low and time is short.

But real love—
the kind Jesus commands—
gets tested when we share life, decisions, and differences.

That's why life can be so hard in the church.
So how is it that the disciples,
How it is that we at St. Andrew's
Can love each other with the same sort of love
Jesus demonstrated to those first disciples?

Let me suggest three ways we can live this out.

First of all we need to know that we are called to be in this vineyard.
Jesus said: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you...”
Most people these days practise an individual spirituality.
It is easier. You can avoid the complication of being with others.
But you can't fulfill Jesus command to love others
Without being in relationship with them.
We need to remind ourselves that we are part of this vineyard.

At the same time we need to remain rooted in Jesus.
Sometimes there are dead branches in a vineyard.
For one reason or another they have failed to draw sustenance
From the vine.

Gathering on a Sunday is just part of a much bigger life
Of Christian discipleship.
Abiding in Jesus means embracing various Christian disciplines
So that we draw the spiritual sap we need to flourish.

And no, it's not usually that we don't have time—
it's that our attention gets pulled in so many directions.

Try setting something aside for a week—
a screen, a familiar habit—
and you may be surprised at the space that opens up.

If we are going to love one another
We will need to discover practises
That allow us to be filled with God's love.

Finally we need to allow ourselves to be pruned.
Jesus tells us that he is the vine and God is the gardener
Who is actively shaping and pruning the vineyard to maximise its fruit.

It is not just one branch but many branches in this vineyard.
God prunes us—not to remove all friction,
but to shape us so we can grow together well.
That often means learning new habits:
making space for others,
sharing the light,
letting go of what hinders love.

You may never need to consult with anyone about your choices at home.
But here is a much larger community
you will need to learn to negotiate,
To make concessions,
to accept that there are other ways of being or doing.

Of course even as we are being shaped for productivity
Sometimes it is helpful to visualise the form we are aiming for.
What does a well-tended vineyard actually look like?

This leads into our Covenant of Care.
[many thanks to Marion and her prep for the women's Bible study]
This is the second and much-improved version.

This covenant summarises our aspirations for this community.
It gives us greater understanding of what loving one another looks like.

This isn't just a document—
it's a picture of the kind of vineyard we're becoming.

Take item #2 for instance.
Under the heading it notes that we commit to
“treat every person with dignity and respect,
recognizing each one as created in the image of God.”
We may be disappointed that someone doesn't know
How to do something we consider basic.
But that doesn't undermine our respect for them,
Because our respect for them is rooted not in their ability
But the fact that they were made in the image of God.

Or take item the last sentence
Under item #4.
“We will avoid gossip, triangulation, and harmful speech,
choosing instead direct and compassionate conversation.”
Being in community will cause tension.
We all have different personalities.
We all have quirks and habits that can be unhelpful
And can drive others mad.

But for those who are committed to loving one another
This tension isn't released by burying our concerns
Or expressing them in passive-aggression ways.
Following the Biblical model whether we have been hurt
Or know others have been hurt by us,
we are called to reconciliation.
This means being willing to be vulnerable:
to speak directly with one another,
to name our hurts and concerns,
and to express our hope for something better.

This is the hard work of love—
and the kind of fruit Jesus is talking about.

As some of you are aware I spend some of my holiday time
With the Junior Rangers from Pouce Coupe and Tumbler Ridge.
They were on an exercise at Powder King, learning to ski
And practising winter survival skills.

They had this practise
Where at the end of the night they gathered
And one of the leaders would share
All of the positive behavior she observed during the day
Or that was reported to her.

Those who were observed being helpful
Were given a button.
Those at the end of the exercise with the most buttons
were given a prize.

At first, I thought it was silly—
shouldn't good behavior be its own reward?
But I realized something:
each evening, they were naming what mattered.
They were showing everyone what a good community looks like.

That's what this Covenant of Care does for us.
It gives shape to the kind of love Jesus calls us to.
No, you won't earn buttons.
But you will bear fruit—
the kind that lasts.

Thanks be to God. Amen.