



Jesus' parables as understood & interpreted from a 21st Century rural perspective

This represents series two of devotional studies, discussions, or sermon background material that brings a 21st century parable perspective that I believe elaborates and adds to Jesus' original parable. It gives an understanding of the rural material from the perspective of the rural people of our time. There are a lot of spiritual parallels in farming, gardening and nature that any rural person would understand see or appreciate.

Ross Neville who has been farming in NSW for 45 years and gardening in a version of permaculture at 5 locations in NSW sees and believes God still teaches through the normal life situation just as Jesus used everyday illustrations for his teaching.

This series is the second after the Cropping series

There are 8 short story explanations listed below under the heading Garden parables. Jesus likened us to trees, vines, fruit producing trees and fig trees. You are invited to understand and think through what does this understanding of the allegory, or practice mean for church or Christian life.

Garden Parables

The trees of the Lord are well watered Psalm 104:15

#17 - #18 Each tree is recognised by its own fruit. Luke 6:43-44ff Jude 12

#19 - #21 I am the vine you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit John 15 :5 Grafting to create new life.

#22 Look at the fig tree and all the trees, when they sprout leaves you can see and know that summer is near Luke 21:29

#23 - #24 Jesus went to a fig tree to find if it had any fruit.. he found it had nothing but leaves because it was not the season for figs... 'May none ever eat fruit from you again' Mark 11:12-14 20-21 Matt 21:18-20 Luke 13:6-9

#25 'Leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilise it. If it bears fruit next year fine! If not, then cut it down Luke 13:8,9

#17 Each tree is recognised by its own fruit. Luke 6:43-44ff



The point Jesus obviously is trying to make is that the whole point of having fruit trees is not just to produce fruit but quality fruit.

Fruit production today is very labour intensive, very expensive and very competitive and no orchardist can afford to allow non-productive or poor producing trees to survive. The whole point in fruit growing is to produce fruit. The whole point of the church is to grow disciples.

One of the common ways to improve fruit production is **grafting**. A graft onto a fruit tree is aimed at improving the fruit or making the plant stronger and more disease resistant. See # 19 for more about spiritual parallels about grafting.

The other way to improve production is by **cross breeding**. Cross breeding happens between families of the same species. **Genetic modification**, breeding and grafting of different species all mean that some trees today produce a combination of fruits. Grafting of different species of apple on the one stock can mean that a variety of species are produced from the one plant. Today there are multi-graft varieties of apples, citrus and stone fruit. (Peacharine, Peachcot) There are what are called fruit salad trees that have 8 different fruits of the same family in the one plant.

You are not able then to recognise what fruit will come from a tree by its size, trunk, leaf structure or location. **You cannot always recognise what type of Christians will come from a church based on its size, its preacher or its theology.**

Some people are nice people, but the nature of that niceness and the genesis of that loving, friendly caring personality can only be recognised when we see the fruit they produce. Some non Christian people actually produce more human kindness and grace than many 'Christians'. Jesus must mean fruit more than just common social justice activity and personality. Often the true nature of the fruit will only be seen when extreme pressure or stress challenges create a choice for self preservation, serving fellowman or acknowledging there is more to life than the now.

Many people in our society are troubled because they see as many non-believers caring for their fellowman as they see Christians.

Some people only make a nominal commitment and when things get tough or uncomfortable the true fruit of their hearts are revealed.

What other fruit may Jesus mean should be seen in our lives?

One that I believe the bible repeats time and again is **worship and acknowledgement of God's role in the activity.** Can you suggest other fruits?

#18 No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit.
Luke 6:43-44ff. The good man produces good from the treasure of his heart.



Jesus is really saying the most important and principle purpose in your life is to produce good fruit. The quantity and nature or type of fruit is important and there must be expected to be a range of levels of quality.

What is good fruit? What is bad fruit or a bad tree?

Good fruit is fruit that has the right amount of sugar, acid, water and is picked at the right stage of maturity. All of these properties determine the use of the fruit and it's ability to survive in cold storage, to be eaten directly, dried or crushed for juice. It must look good, taste good and feel good as well as lasting for a reasonable time as good fruit. Notice there is a use for less than perfect fruit and the time of picking is critical. **You don't have to a perfect or complete Christian to be of use. The optimum ministry effectiveness depends on timing within any pilgrim walk.**

What makes a tree bad? A genetic deficiency, an inherent weakness! The outside environment! Over fertilisation or bad pruning can reduce a trees capacity to produce fruit. The tree will aim to produce as much branch and foliage and not fruit. This can be rectified but it will take a few seasons. Luke 13:8,9 If the tree is in the wrong situation for moisture availability, soil nutrition or climactically it may never produce much fruit or fruit of any quality. Temperature or moisture are critical. A frosty prone location may reduce all fruit blossoms time after time. Unless there is availability to bees or wind to allow crosspollination of complementary trees some fruit trees may be useless. **The outside environment of every Christian in their walk is critical in their effectiveness. The inherent weakness in all Christians is their sinful nature that if not handed over to Christ to control or manage daily it will damage all potential.**

What makes bad fruit?

Any thing that interferes with the tree feeding the correct **balance of nutrients and moisture** to the fruit it produces will result in the production of bad fruit.

Such interference may come from soil nutrient deficiency, the season or critical soil moisture fluctuation, tree diseases, bacteria, fungal, or insect damage. The fruit is extremely vulnerable to **attack by pests** that may affect the fruit quality: fruit fly, aphids, moths, bugs, borers, scale, animals and birds to name a few The fruit are extremely vulnerable to **diseases**: Mould, rust, root rot, leaf spot, powder mildew, leaf curl, gall. **Viruses** can infect the rootstock and they can only be controlled by replacement: Stony pit, chlorotic and necrotic spot conditions. A good tree. if unattended, can produce bad fruit but it may occasionally produce good.

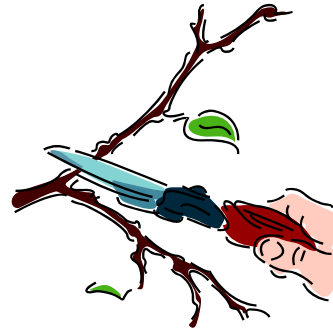
Can a good Christian sometimes produce bad fruit?

Can a non-Christian sometimes produce good fruit?

All fruit trees need a degree of nurturing and care to produce the best fruit. How is the home fellowship, group or church you belong to providing you with protection and nurture from life passage struggles, false teaching or para-Christian activity?

How could that protection be improved?

#19 I am the vine you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him he will bear much fruit John 15 :5



Grafting is a way to improve the quality of fruit produced. A graft is usually made onto stronger root stock. In the same way a person who makes a commitment to be a disciple of Christ is grafting themselves onto Jesus and some type of Christian fellowship to be their source of energy, love and grace.

A graft works best when it is done in late winter or early spring. An essential feature of all grafts is to match the cambian layers of the stock and scion over as large an area as possible and to then seal the graft to prevent drying out. Grafts are commonly made onto a stronger root developing stock or stock that is well established in a particular environment. The genetic modifications are trying to improve frost resistance disease resistance water requirements or the storage or sugar quality of the fruit. With the cost of fruit production today any tree that does not produce good volume or quality of fruit is removed destroyed or regrafted. The inferior quality fruit has implications for the future of the tree itself. **The deeds and priorities of what you do and say with your life is a reflection of what your root stock is like. Luke 6:44**

When we become a Christian we have a choice:

- We can be grafted onto a church or a denomination and become a Christian reflecting the values fruit and actions of that particular church or denomination.
- We can be grafted onto the preaching and personality of a preacher and become a Christian reflecting the values fruit and actions of that preacher or the theological perspective of that preacher.
- We can become grafted onto the teaching and example of Jesus with the Holy Spirit supplying the nutrients and guidance reflecting the values, fruit and actions that we learn God wants from us.

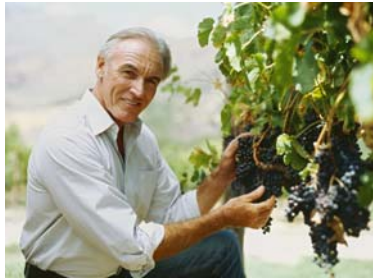
A Christian cannot hide the impact of the source of the changed heart or sap that drives our actions and attitude. It is unbalanced if it is only the first or second of these choices, **we have to have a personal relationship with Jesus, it is not enough to be a graft through an intermediary.**

Can you see, as the consequence of these grafts, the difference in the nature of the fruit? How is the Christian church today like a fruit salad tree? (8 types of fruit on the one stock).

For a graft or a Christian commitment to work you have to be continually in contact with God and you must not allow yourself to dry out.

What are some things that have made you lose contact or dry up as a Christian? Are their parts of your life you have not let the Spirit change or transform?

20 I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener.... He cuts off every branch in me that does not bear fruit, John 15:1-9



Jesus says he is the **true vine** of God. Israel considered themselves to be a vine of God but the prophets repeatedly claimed they were degenerate vines Is 5:1-7 Jer 2:21 Ez 19:1 Hosea 10:1 **Jesus is warning about making sure you are part of the correct root stock, not a denomination or a theological group but part of someone who does provide a direct daily link to God.**

Grape vines are prolific growers and require drastic pruning each year. Vines can survive for up to thirty years or more but a young vine is generally not allowed to fruit properly or effectively for the first two or three years. Each successive stage of development of a vine builds on the previous stage. Buds developed in year N were formed in the spring and summer of the previous year N-1. Storm, fire or disease in Year N will affect year N+1. The stock scion and roots store starch carbohydrates that gives a supply over winter until the spring leaves take over as the energy providers. This is an important principle we need to take notice of God may not be continuously revealing himself to us in special ways. **Every Christian tells you of times of winter where their past experiences of God carry them through because God doesn't seem to be near at times. The Christian life is a build up life learning's that provide the potential for fruit.**

The root system of a vine draws water and minerals from the soil and these are converted into hormones that circulates around the plant as sap. This passage alludes to this as **'abiding in Christ'**. **Christ's presence has to flow through us and we have to maintain the flow to grow.** This sap begins to transform the plant and when it begins bleeding from the prune cuts it is the first sign of the start of the growth cycle. The Holy Spirit's presence can at times ooze out of people as a sign of a great awakening or revival about to happen. A vine produces two kinds of branches, one fruit bearing and one non fruit bearing. The non fruit bearing is removed annually to preserve the life and energy of the vine. The fruit bearing branches are trained and pruned annually so that the fruit grows in a convenient place for harvesting. eg Along T trellises or overhead trellises.

The pruning timbers of the grape are of no use. It does not even burn well and vineyards have a burning of the canes ceremony as a way of marking the change in season. Who do you think are the canes that are not fruit producing?. Those who

refuse to accept Jesus as Lord, those who live lives without deeds, those who fall away and abandon their faith. Are there canes in your life?

How well do you abide in Christ?

How does abiding in Christ daily manifest in your life?

#21 I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener....

while every branch that bears fruit he prunes so that it will bear even more fruit.... John 15:1-9



Christians can expect to be corrected or blocked during their life.

Pruning affects the quality and quantity of grapes produced. The aim of pruning is to reduce the number of buds on each vine. Each bud produces a shoot which in turn can produce up to three bunches of grapes.

If there are too many buds the plant may not be able to ripen properly or the vine itself may be weakened.

If there are too few there is not enough outlets for the vines growth capabilities and the fruit crop yield will be reduced as the growth energy goes into shoots.

Cane pruning usually involves leaving at least 5 buds.

Spur pruning aims at 2 or 3 buds.

The timing of pruning influences the timing of budding and the axiom is to wait until all the leaves have fallen and the sap stopped flowing before pruning. Pruning is one of the most labour intensive aspects in a vineyard.

Mechanical pruning is an economic alternative but is not as precise and leads to the uneven distribution of bunches of grapes.

Are you able to see how God has pruned certain congregations or groups so that there is the best quality growth of disciples. It is hard to get the balance right. Most mission planners suggest a congregation work on no more than two or three special projects in a year. Many activities and mission groups do not necessarily produce the most and best Christian disciples. Too few activities and mission groups means the energy goes into growing the church infrastructure.

In you life cycle how regularly do you prune your activities? Do you do it annually?

Are you a cane or a spur?

Can you see value in yearly evaluating your activities and the channels into which your energies will be going during the next year and cutting back to only 2 or 3 buds or if you are a cane 5 buds.
