

'Trees of Life' Lent Course: Week 4 - Thursday 14th March 2024

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Preacher: Matt Wallace

[0 : 00] So, week four, and as is our habit, just have a very quick whistle-stop review of where we've got to so far. And I will be quick with this, because each week there's more and more to include, but we'll get through it, we'll get through it.

So, wood, trees, and everything connected with them play a major part in so many of the stories of the Bible. Trees being a theme which runs through from Genesis to Revelation.

Indeed, humans are likened to trees in various places. God also is deeply connected to trees too. Trees which, therefore, often seem to represent this choice between doing things our way or doing things God's way.

And so, from the Garden of Eden, through the burning bush that we looked at, onto the wooden-framed tabernacle, and then a temple built from cedar, all themselves, it seems, seen as a mini-garden of Edens, if you like, in which God's presence dwelt, in which this choice between God's ways and our ways was laid before people.

We can see in each of these stories and others that we've looked at, well, really, how wood and trees, they give this sense of continuity through all these stories and encounters of this idea of God being with us and this choice of whether we do things our way or God's way.

[1 : 21] So, last week, though, we saw how Jesus' life picks up this theme as well. We saw how he's described as a shoot or a branch emerging from the royal family tree of King David.

Jesus growing up in Nazareth, we saw that word Nazareth, Netsareth, this word Netza meaning branch. And indeed, Jesus claims this tree-like role for himself, at one point calling himself the true vine, and that we are his branches, you know, connected and rooted in him to bear good fruit in our lives.

Fruit, as we've seen in previous weeks, fruit in season, at the right time, in the right way, and also fruit that will last because it's God's good fruit growing out of us.

Now, this little phrase here that Jesus uses in saying that I am the true vine, if you recall last week, we focused really on the vine part of this saying of Jesus.

But to kick off our reflections, I suppose, this week, we're good to unpack why Jesus chose to call himself the true vine.

[2 : 41] And this seems to be something that Jesus does sometimes. So, he takes a title, but then he adds another word to it to sort of qualify it, it seems.

So, such as in this one, when he says, I am the good shepherd. Not just I am the shepherd, I am the good shepherd. So, taking this example of Jesus being a good shepherd, why do we think, and you can talk about this in pairs or threes maybe, just for a minute, and then we'll come back together.

Why might Jesus have felt the need to call himself the good shepherd, do we think? Why the good shepherd? 30 seconds, just between you. See if you've got any brainwaves on this.

All right, quick fire round then. Any ideas why Jesus, or what do we think, why would Jesus make a point of calling himself the good shepherd? Yeah, yeah.

There's a couple of Greek words for good. I don't know which one it is when Jesus says the good shepherd. I can find out half time, and we'll find out. I think one means good as in good quality, the other one means good as in beautiful, and we'll see which one Jesus describes himself as.

[3 : 56] Yeah, good point, Paul. Thank you. Any other ideas why Jesus might call himself the good shepherd? Dave. Yes. So, thinking of the hired shepherd, he runs off because he doesn't care, because he's a hired man, comparing him with that.

You are good, Dave. Well done. In a row. Yeah, yeah. I think we cracked it there between us, which is great. As Ellen was saying, we talk about it at Christmas, because that's where the focus often on shepherds become, but they were probably the lowest of the low in terms of occupations, along with tax collectors and prostitutes and so on.

They were seen as scum, basically, by most people. Very untrustworthy, very dodgy. You know, if you wanted to get a dodgy skybox or something, they were the kind of people you'd go to in the day.

Yeah, exactly. Yeah. The sheep fell off the back of a lorry, you know, that kind of thing, you know. So, shepherds were untrustworthy. They were notorious liars. So, they weren't allowed even to testify in court because their word wasn't taken as truthful or anything like that.

So, yeah, like a hired shepherd hand, we were saying, if a sheep goes missing in a field, they would deny all knowledge of that and they'd say, oh, maybe a wolf got it, and then actually they flogged it to someone on the side or had it for a food to themselves or something.

[5 : 13] Yeah. Therefore, when Jesus says, I'm the good shepherd, it is in contrast to this kind of perceived badness of shepherds, all of which does tie in with a Christmas story.

And it's amazing that the first witnesses to tell the truth about Jesus that the angels came to were shepherds because you thought of anyone to be your testimony, why would God choose shepherds?

Well, that's exactly why God did choose shepherds, to throw it all upside down from the word go. So, yeah, when Jesus says, I'm the good shepherd, it's in contrast to the perception of dodgy shepherds, shall we say.

That's what it seems anyway. And so, with that in mind, any ideas why Jesus might therefore say, I am the true vine? Have you ever heard anything about this in terms of what it's in contrast to?

Good points, good points, yep. I think they're both on it there in some ways. I think, obviously, the opposite of true is false. So, it seems there will be a fake or an untrue vine, shall we say.

[6 : 22] And there's two possibilities that it's reckoned why Jesus might have called himself the true vine in particular. So, one possibility is that Jesus was comparing himself to another vine, which everyone who'd visited the temple in Jerusalem would have been aware of.

So, in the time of Jesus, there was a huge golden, literally gold, golden vine which hung over the entrance to the temple sanctuary. And it's a nice bit of bling, you know, a nice bit of decoration, perhaps, on the temple.

And according to historians from roughly the time of Jesus, we gather that worshippers were encouraged to buy personalised golden leaves or grapes or even bunches of grapes to add to this golden vine in the temple as a public sign of their devotion to God and to his temple.

And then, every so often, apparently, the temple authorities would prune this golden vine and use some of the gold for the purposes and the expenses and so on of the temple.

So, in Jesus' day, there would seem to be this golden vine around the big door to the sanctuary. Again, just with those next to you for a minute or so, what do you think might be some of the pros of this golden vine?

[7 : 47] What was the good things about it? And then, what would be some of the cons, the bad thing about having this blingy, golden vine in the temple? What would be a positive thing about it? What would be a negative thing about it?

Let's pick on the positives, first of all. What might you imagine might be the positives of having this golden vine in the temple? Not a lot.

Kept people in work, yeah? The local goldsmiths and all that? Yeah, it could be an expression of their worship and their attempt to give God the best and all that, yeah? Good stuff. Let's go to the bad stuff.

What would be the negatives? And we touched on a little bit. Don, I think you were first in with a negative. It does open itself to easy sneak a grape in your pocket on the way home kind of thing.

Yeah, Ellen. Yeah. That's a good point. Yeah, the money, the 30 pieces of silver, the equivalent that Judas had, that money came from somewhere. Oh, I hadn't thought of that. That's an angle.

[8 : 48] Yeah, well done. Well done, Leslie. Good points. Good points. Yeah. So it could be, in light of perhaps the shadier side of these golden grapes and so on, that this is what Jesus is referring to.

It's the obvious kind of thing that was in people's minds, perhaps when they think about a vine, it's in their face every day when they're going to worship and Jesus was saying these words in the vicinity of the temple as well.

So it could be that. It could be that why Jesus says he's the true vine. That's one possibility, but there probably is something else instead when Jesus is talking about this because another possibility which is connected to this idea of a dodgy grapevine, if you like, is the way in which the whole people of Israel were originally intended by God to be like a vineyard, like a vineyard.

People who are blessed by God to be a blessing to the whole world, a living garden of Eden, if you like, growing with God and offering their good fruit, the fruit of their vines, you know, fruit of their lives to all who were in need.

And this vineyard picture, it's an image which comes in various places in the Bible when it describes the people of God in this way. There's a passage, for example, in Isaiah chapter five, and it's a song of the vineyard, it's called, or a song or a poem that Isaiah says.

[10 : 15] He puts it initially like this. He says, my beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it and cleared it of stones and planted it with choicest vines.

He built a watchtower in the midst of it and cut out a wine press as well. Then he looked for a crop of good grapes. So words from Isaiah there.

And let's just go through this a little bit so we can glean all the metaphors and good stuff in it. So, for a start, who's Isaiah talking about here? Who is my beloved that he's referring to?

Who do you reckon? God. Spam. Yeah, God. So God had a vineyard on a fertile hill, or fertile hillside. Where is this hill, do we think?

Where is this high place? Garden of Eden. It could be the Garden of Eden. Yeah, that was a high place. Where else was a famous high place? Siongah could be.

- [11 : 14] Yeah, could be. We think that Isaiah here, he's talking about the hill on which the temple was built. So this Mount Moriah in Jerusalem here.
- We'll see why in a minute. So we're told that God then dug it and cleared it of stones. What might that mean? Other than some sort of Alan Titchmarsh skills going on by God.
- What might that mean? He dug it and cleared it of stones. If it is in Jerusalem here. He got rid of the people that weren't supposed to be there. That seems to be perhaps more, that's why they're stony people perhaps.
- And the problem is, the Old Testament's full of stories it seems, where God is said to have driven out Israel's enemies, including from the land of Israel. The land of Israel was populated by all sorts of people before the Israelites got there.
- And the stories that go through the Old Testament are basically of genocide, which is a problem for us because we wouldn't believe that God is someone who would support genocide.
- [12 : 15] So it could be that, but it could well be, as Tony was saying, actually more positively than that, God gave the people every potential, every possibility to give them the best place possible for them to thrive.
- What next? Well, God planted it with the choicest vines. Who are the vines, do we think? The people. People of Israel, yeah. And in particular, perhaps, the leaders and the kings and so on.
- The people to lead the people in it. What next? Well, he built a watchtower in the midst of it. What is this watchtower, do we imagine? If we remember where it is.
- Temple. Spot on. Yeah, so the temple, it seems, is the watchtower, the place for God to be with and to look over his vineyard, to look over his people. And he cut out a wine press as well.
- Why might this be significant? What do we think? Why a wine press? Yeah, crushing the grapes, Jew Francis and all that. Yes. So they're crushing the grapes to make the wine.
- [13 : 17] But why might a wine press in particular, what does that symbolise, if you like? Yeah. I think it's meant to be associated with the idea of celebration and hospitality.
- And we'll do a wine press for this whole vineyard. We'll give away all this good wine. We're meant to invite people in to have a party with us to celebrate God's goodness in this holy city.
- And then, we're told, he looked for a crop of good grapes. Again, what might that mean? That metaphor? The people, yeah. And the goodness in their lives. He looked for people to live in the right ways, characterised by love, joy, peace, kindness, that kind of stuff.
- That seems to be God's plan that Isaiah outlines. Plan for his people to be a vineyard, bearing good fruit for the benefit of everyone, this wine press to give the wine of the kingdom, if you like, away.
- But then here's how Isaiah continues this little song, this last line. So God looked for a crop of good grapes, but it yielded only bad grapes, bad grapes, nasty, stingy, little, bitter, good-for-nothing fruit.
- [14 : 29] We might say fruit full of violence and hatred, you know, of greed and corruption. And as we know, as we go through the Old Testament stories, on the whole, the people of Israel blew it.
- You know, they blew their calling to be God's example to the world. And so in this passage here, well, Isaiah has God saying this, and now inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

What more could have been done for my vineyard than I have done for it? When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad? And as this passage goes on, God is described as withdrawing his blessing and his protection from these ancient Israelites because they've become a rotten vineyard.

Because, as it says a couple of verses later, because God, he looked for justice, but saw bloodshed. He looked for righteousness, but he heard cries of distress.

So that's Isaiah's take on things, how things have gone. And holding those thoughts, though, we're going to take a look at an encounter that Jesus has in the temple in Jerusalem with the chief priests of Israel of his day, Israel's religious leaders who Jesus has already had a few run-ins with due to their oppressive style, perhaps the corruption, in the way that they were leading the people.

[16 : 07] And so with those words of Isaiah in mind, all his talk of vineyards and fruit and watchtowers and wine presses. Have a listen to this parable that Jesus tells to these religious leaders, which is found in Matthew's Gospel, chapter 21.

Have a listen to this. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower.

Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

The tenants seized his servants. They beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way.

Last of all, he sent his son to them. They will respect my son, he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, this is the heir.

[17 : 15] Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance. So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?

He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, they replied, and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time.

Jesus said to them, Have you never read in the Scriptures the stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone?

The Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes. Therefore, I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.

Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces. Anyone on whom it falls will be crushed. When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus' parables, they knew he was talking about them.

[18 : 39] They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet. So Jesus clearly knew Isaiah 5, those prophecies there, but it's a blistering attack in the temple on Israel's leaders of the day.

You know, these farmers, as he calls them in the parable, who are supposed to tend God's vineyard in order to produce good fruit. They're given every chance, it seems, to improve.

You know, God, the vineyard owner, we're told, sends his servants to speak to them. That would have been prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and Amos and so, you know, to tell them to change their ways effectively.

But as the parable explains, these servants, these prophets, are rejected and beaten and sometimes killed by the religious leaders.

Eventually, as the parable says, God, the vineyard owner, sends his own son as the ultimate prophet, if you like, thinking surely they'll respect him. But in this parable and perhaps in its own kind of prophetic prediction of what the religious leaders in Jesus' day would soon do to him, they kill the son as well.

[19 : 59] And what happens to these religious leaders who kill the vineyard owner's son? Well, they say it of themselves. He said, God, he will bring those wretches to a wretched end, you know, unwittingly it seems, condemning themselves.

But what's more, then give the vineyard, give the kingdom of God to new farmers, new people, new leaders who will produce the good fruit that God was after.

And that, I think, is the context in which I'd suggest we're meant to see Jesus speaking of himself as the true vine, you know, the true vineyard, if you like.

The one who champions life the way God, the vineyard owner, always intended it to be lived, characterised by compassion and care and generosity and love and not corruption and deceit and oppression and greed.

I take Kathy's point earlier, we're not saying every priest, every hierarchical person in Jesus' day was bad but there was enough obviously to get Jesus riled to the extent that he had to tell that kind of story.

[21 : 09] For Jesus, these religious leaders on the whole and certainly the temple system they represented, even the land itself, he said, this isn't God's vineyard anymore, the way you've been doing it.

Rather, Jesus says, I am now the vine, I am the vine, I am the true vine and you who are my disciples and anyone who follows my ways, you are now my branches who will produce good lasting fruit, takes it off the religious leaders and gives it to the people, to the fishermen, to the everyday folks.

So, in response to that and with that kind of blistering attack as I said of Jesus, on the religious and political leaders of his day. Got some questions for us to consider around our table and we can spend a good few minutes looking at these.

So, see what you make of these. So, God likens his people to a vineyard he has planted. What is that picture of a vineyard? What is a metaphor? Maybe, does it tell us about the kind of people God is calling us to be?

Secondly, Jesus was fiercely critical of many of the religious and political leaders of his day. What do you think Jesus would have to say to the religious and political leaders of our day?

[22 : 33] I know we're not meant to talk about religion and politics but you can't avoid it here. All right. What would Jesus say to those in our day do we think? A bit more positively though. What might a vision for fruitful, religious, and political leadership look like today if we can imagine that?

And what role might we be called to play in helping this vision to become a reality? You can go as deep as you want with this.

We'll have a good few minutes. Grab a drink. Try and tackle these questions. Then we'll have some feedback and we'll see where we go from there. Okie dokie.

Thank you very much everyone. Plenty to chew on then. By the sounds of it. Question number one. God likens his people to a vineyard that he's planted. What does this picture tell us about the kind of people God is calling us to be?

What kind of vineyard metaphors did you come up with between you? We'll get this on mic so it comes out on the recording and if you don't want to be on the recording just let me know and we can edit you out or give you a chipmunk voice or something like that.

[23 : 40] But any ideas on why a vineyard and the qualities of a vineyard in particular? Ellen. So we spoke about how it produces fruit and we as God's people produce fruit and then we looked at Galatians 5 where it talks about the qualities of the spirit and the gifts of the spirit and what it produces and the kind of people God is calling us to be all of these gifts in us and then Nigel said about being community based and being part of outreach and if you're part of the outreach you've got all of these gifts in you so you're only spreading God into the community.

Brilliant. Nigel says how like the vine intertwined to make one big fruit and one big lovely vine so that we all work together. That's what you said isn't it? Nice work Nice work Yeah the intertwined vine Nice Great stuff Yeah so lots of fruit of the spirit in there I guess the bunch of grapes is a nice metaphor for that of joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness all that stuff all in one bunch but separate qualities within the one I guess and being alongside each other.

Any other vineyard thoughts that you had? Leslie I said about how vineyards are grown you know they are grown in rows yes they do intertwine with their branches but they grow to a certain standard height but they grow strong and if they're in the right conditions they will bear the best fruit and it is pruned so bits are pruned out that shouldn't be there so that they can grow stronger in their fruitfulness he talks about God pruning the bits of us that don't bear fruit you know that kind of stuff yeah good stuff so Jesus was fiercely critical of many of the religious and political leaders of his day what do you think Jesus would have to say to the religious and political leaders of our day?

I think he'd be speechless says Leslie what do you reckon people? okay is this you Mark or is this Nigel? okay our Ellen said he would say look up and listen look up and listen things haven't changed okay so it's in corruption and not the best of examples and all that Dave I think it's quite difficult to be critical of political leaders because I'm finding it very difficult at the moment with the religious set up with all that's coming out so I don't know what people know but the whole soul survivor thing is just deeply shocking and that's spilling over into new wine and then recently we've had stuff about Holy Trinity Brompton coming out all sorts of things like this and you think oh my goodness where will this stop where is it what is it and we talked a lot about food banks as well we've now just become a society that accepts that food banks should be there and that's a good one because at least it is largely churches that are moving that forward and actually getting at our politicians but I don't know whether we'll ever get our religious house in order because the things are quite disturbing and shocking and I think we tend to just focus on the positive and then somebody will pull things from under our feet that doesn't mean we should shy away and hide away but I think we do have to have our voice heard and perhaps the wrong voices are being heard that's you know people get themselves in positions of power or leadership and we assume their voice is the only voice when actually there are lots of other voices out there and I was mentioning when we talk about food about the

Trussell Trust which does a fantastic job of lobbying and engaging MPs and making people aware and I think there are not many of our political leaders who are not aware and actually do care but we just haven't got to the point yet where it leads to wholesale change thank you thank you yeah I like the point about who are we to judge Jesus said something about this on a wood theme didn't he about planking your own eye rather than someone else's bit of speck but yeah more wood yes I have a thoughts on this one what would Jesus say to our leaders today I think he'd tell them first of all to work together for the good of the people and to put all question of power and money aside and work together to bring the country into a caring loving community vow for prime minister I reckon good stuff good stuff thank you and then Dave over here just a quick one tell the truth like it like it which leads which does politics lead religion or does religion lead politics how should it be yeah thanks

[28 : 48] I looked up when Paul mentioned about what was the word of the good shepherd and the good in the Greek is the word kalos in John 10 11 when Jesus says that and kalos is this word good as in beautiful and inspiring and helping others to see to follow whatever is lovely and captivating and all that kind of stuff and I wonder if a better way to overcome the bad is to be better not just slag it off kind of thing so there's got to be something inspiring and positive that I think that's where Jesus was at leading things by example rather than just being destructive deconstructive if you like with it all apparently what we've got parents who's looking after their kids and all that lot they need some help like our parents who got off the off the streets like they need some help for their parents social care system all that backstop for people who are struggling yeah thank you go on

Trish well done yeah I was just thinking that Jesus would be aghast at the factions within Christianity and the arguments and the petty it has to be done this way and we have to do things that way and as Mark said I think we've lost the reality of what Jesus' religion was all about if Jesus was here today he would make it all so much more simple I think thanks Trish thank you and Mike the question on faithful religious and politician leaders I do believe they probably need each other the righteous one the religious ones to call out the wrongs in the politicians the politicians have the power to work and improve people's lives and the religious leaders have the power to correct them where they're going wrong so I think they need each other one for everyday thing and one to make sure they're doing it right thanks Mike thank you thank you yeah I mean it's interesting the House of Lords gets some criticism for having bishops in it 26 bishops whatever it is unelected and so on and rightly in some ways people might think that's not the place in a democracy yet on the other hand as Mike's saying actually there's real wisdom and learning and an angle into people's lives that perhaps might be missing if they weren't there so yeah you can see both sides of that but yeah thank you

Mike thank you that leads us really and touches on to the third one what might a vision for fruitful religious and political leadership look like today let's think we've had bits of it like in terms of tell the truth and all that kind of stuff what we got over here Mitch thanks well we started to talk about our political situation our country and then we went on to talk about Russia and what was going on in Israel and Ukraine and America and various other things that we seen on the news but personally I find that quite difficult because I find it quite mind-blowing really and it makes me feel a little insignificant and what can I do about it then we talked about religious and political leaders we thought a vision for them would be one to enable individual communities to be able to support themselves and to be able to flourish and we felt that if every individual community was not able to flourish then whole nations would then flourish once those communities came together and so we found that more helpful I suppose than looking at it at a whole world level and just to pick up on the word fruitful as well and it's going back a little bit to looking at vineyards but

I guess we haven't talked that much about the kind of the wine that's produced and the drinking of the wine and really the sole purpose of a vineyard is to produce wine and we drink wine when we're having a good time and to be joyful and I think religious and political leadership would be people who enable their communities to live in joy as well so yeah that's what we talked about imagine there was a political party with joy in their manifesto was like a headline that would change the world somewhat I imagine but yeah thank you for that Mitch all the small ways in which villages and towns come together Kim I think it's very idealistic however I always looked back to Jesus and Jesus did what he said he lived as he talked and I think if we had religious and political leaders and I actually think I know it sounds quite naive but I think that political leaders go into the role to help other people they want a better society but they get sucked in to the mechanism of politics like the press are always trying to trip them up or find out something wrong with them or whatever but I think that I mean the one political leader who

I thought actually walked the walk and talked the talk was Angela Merkel you know she was the leader of a very rich and powerful country but lived in a flat and did her own cleaning and cooking and washing but I'm sure there was a lot wrong with Angela Merkel as well but I think the baseline of religious and political people are is make your life what you say is what you do and also what you do is to make society a better place easy yeah tour to talk all the walk all that stuff yes again I come back to Kathy's point earlier about that the leaders in Jesus day is a broad brush in terms of they're being corrupt and dodgy but actually you look in the House of Parliament and what you hear from politicians who are decent is that there's a lot of decent politicians they just don't get the platforms that the more mouthy dodgy ones get it seems but I know that locally you know even if you're Labour or Blue or whatever locally all our councillors I think have got

[34 : 46] Burnwood at their heart you know I've been to a few council meetings and it's disheartening when it becomes factional because they've all got the same interest that you'll notice when you they've all got the same interests at heart to make Burnwood better and it's a shame that kind of pervades into our national consciousness as well but yeah all right any other thoughts on this the role that we might play I mean we're touching on it a bit with this final question in what the last couple of things we've done especially Mitch's point about starting small perhaps and local and letting that diffuse out but any other final thoughts on any of this Ellen I just thought because it's played on my mind quite a few times and it's a bit sort of what Mitch was saying about well what can I do what can I help but it's just a reassurance that your voice matters you think like I know what who am I I'm just I'm not going to be listened to or my vote won't count your vote does count and somebody does listen and you might think like the wars that are going on and all that kind of stuff and you think you know what what can I do but like with with local elections and everything that go on your voice does count and your vote counts and a lot of people like I've got friends who say I I don't want to I'm using politics here as an example but they don't vote anymore because they think it's pointless and they think well you know well what's the point anyway it's just gonna I know how it's gonna go well how do you know if you don't vote because it might have gone another way so it's just it's just a reassurance of people really like because visions don't become reality unless you act on it so I think still raise your voice you need to shout nice one yeah just as Alan says I think it's important that we vote but it's also important that we look at our candidates as in much detail as we can to make sure we're voting for the person we think is going to do the best society or our role or whoever it's it's most important not just going willy-nilly and vote really look at the candidates beforehand thank you thank you now our elections coming up on in May locally and so on and a general at some stage this year as well but yeah all right I'm away at a time but but thank you very much everyone thank you all right so a few sort of thoughts really to include our time tonight and then set us up for what we'll look at next week I guess it's interesting really at the end of the the parable that Jesus told in the temple to the religious leaders we're told this at the end that the leaders they looked for a way to arrest Jesus but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he

Jesus was a prophet and when this parable is told it's no wonder really because it comes hot on the heels because just the day before Jesus had ridden into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey hailed by these same crowds hailed as a prophet even a king a day we know as Palm Sunday now Dave is speaking on Palm Sunday in a couple of weeks I don't want to steal any of his thunder for that one so we won't dwell too much on Palm Sunday but one thing worth mentioning here is that the palm branch was an ancient sign primarily of victory or victory and I think that's interesting because we see this theme of victory in so many other wood or tree related aspects of this last week of Jesus's life leading up to his crucifixion so for example at the last supper when Jesus distributes wine the fruit of the vine as he calls it he tells the disciples this he says take this and divide it among you for I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes harks back and seems to Mitch's idea about wine being there for joy and even with his arrest and his death imminent

Jesus uses the language here of hope of victory you know God's kingdom will come and then we'll raise a glass then we can drink again well then in the garden of Gethsemane just after this located on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem even in the midst of real anguish for Jesus there's still a sense of victory there too in what way well I think it's worth noting for a start that the setting of Jesus's anguish is a garden it's a garden with trees and it's on the Mount of Olives so it's on a high place so a garden with trees on a high place what does that remind us of the Garden of Eden yeah reminds us of the Garden of Eden itself a garden with trees on a high place and it's a hint I think because Jesus prays in the garden that something's going to happen which is going to connect Eden with what's going on in Gethsemane as well now the word Gethsemane it means olive press the way in which olive oil was produced by squeezing the olives to a pulp and in the way the story of the Garden of Gethsemane is told Jesus is in effect being squeezed here you know he's under immense pressure he's described as his sweat appearing like drops of blood almost like oil dripping from a crushed olive but despite this pressure

Jesus doesn't buckle you know he prays to God yes father if you are willing take this cup from me and if possible take this cup of suffering this burden this bitterness away from me in other words do I have to swallow what's on offer here but having asked the question Jesus still defers to his father yet not my will but yours be done and so in the Garden of Gethsemane between the trees you know on a high place it's as if Jesus relives the choice that was first given to Adam and Eve in their garden between the trees on a high place where God effectively asks are you going to choose my way or do things your way and although Adam and Eve they choose their way eaten from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Gethsemane in Jesus Garden Jesus chooses God's way even in the face of death in effect eats from the tree of life and again that's a sign of victory of strength and of obedience obedience and a willingness to die things that seem a defeat but actually will become a victory because they set in motion the undoing of the curse and the sin that

Adam and Eve's initial choice represented and in following his arrest and his trial and sentencing to death Jesus is then nailed to a wooden cross on top of a high place now how do we know it's a high place well for a start we're told that Jesus' crucifixion was being watched from a distance by some of the women implying that it kind of stood out on the horizon perhaps what's more the place where Jesus was crucified is called the place of the skull Golgotha is its name in Aramaic or Calvary in Latin and that suggests a skull shape like a dome like a hilltop if you like a mound there but what's more also the the archaeology of the place that we think it all happened which is underneath where the church called the church of the Holy sepulchre is in Jerusalem they've done digging down and it suggests that looking at the layers and stuff that it was a hill that was about 12 meters high in Jesus day so it really was you know there to be looked up to as a high place in itself so wood on a high place and that as we've seen over the weeks is a combination that in the stories of people like Adam and Eve and Noah and Abraham and Moses wood and high places often signifies that choice that test is being faced again God's way or our way how is the choice illustrated on Golgotha on Calvary here well I'd suggest by the fact that Jesus's cross as we see here he's flanked on either side by two other crosses two other crosses which held criminals who were crucified either side of Jesus you see yeah on the one hand you've got one criminal mocking Jesus effectively saying aren't you the Messiah you know save yourself and us that's one choice my way if you like but the other side of him is the other guy getting crucified the other criminal and after noting that Jesus doesn't deserve to die he chooses the way of Jesus saying this in contrast to the guy on the other side he says actually remember me when you come into your kingdom and we could see these two crosses either side of Jesus represent this choice God's way or our own way you know the two crosses illustrate that test that we all will need to decide for ourselves now one final little bit because Jesus reply to this criminal who says remember me

[44 : 23] I think it's fascinating because Jesus says this he says I tell you the truth today you will be with me in paradise now why is that fascinating well this word paradise actually means enclosed park or garden today you'll be with me in the garden and again it's another hint I think that we see the crucifixion as pointing to and undoing the sin of Eden again a hint of the victory that will come through Jesus's death and resurrection today if you like you'll be with me back in Eden this garden of delight this this paradise the way God intended life to be lived and so leave us on a positive note tonight with this idea of the victory and the renewed garden in mind one final clip tonight from John's gospel chapter 20 in which we'll see a little bit of story of

Jesus's resurrection which sets us up for our final week next week now Mary stood outside the tomb crying as she wept she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white seated where Jesus's body had been one at the head and the other at the foot she asked her woman why are you crying they have taken my lord away she said and I don't know where they have put him at this she turned round and saw Jesus standing there but she did not realize that it was Jesus she asked her woman why are you crying who is it you are looking for thinking he was the gardener she said sir if you have carried him away tell me where you have put him and I will get him Jesus said to her do not hold on to me for I have not yet ascended to the father go instead to the my brothers and tell them I am ascending to my father and your father to my God and your God told this thinking that he was the gardener that's Mary's thought initially and I guess in some ways Jesus was you know his resurrection it ushers in the renewal of the garden of Eden this this place of encounter and closeness with God initially spoiled by sin yeah but now given new life and new hope a new beginning new creation if you like through the resurrection victory of Jesus it's no accident that Jesus is raised to life in a garden because his resurrection represents this new creation and that's the language that the apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians picks up when he says this therefore if anyone is in Christ the new creation has come the old is gone and the new is here and that's a theme which we'll pick up next week in our final week of these sessions so all that's to come next time