

We are the branches

[Acts 16.9-15](#)

[Revelation 21.10-14; 21.22-22.5](#)

[John 14.23-29](#)

Just before the gospel reading and sermon, I'd like to play this poem by Warsan Shire called 'Home'. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nI9D92Xiygo>



Warsan, born in Kenya to Somali parents, was never a refugee but her uncle was and she has tried to capture the plight of refugees. Two reasons for playing this poem: Firstly, our mission focus this month is on refugees. Sue is doing the rations challenge as a way of raising money for refugees and I commend that to you. But also, this poem is oddly apt for what I want to speak about this morning.

Last week Sue spoke on loving one another which is where the so-called 'farewell discourse' begins as Jesus starts to teach his disciples the most extraordinary and profound concept that the gospel has been leading up to. Prior to John 13, the emphasis of Jesus' teaching has been on how he and the Father are one. He has been sent by the Father, he only does what the Father does and indeed he and the Father are one. From chapter 13 until 17, Jesus tries to explain how we also are invited into this unity. I find it extremely difficult to wrap my head around. This is the trinity with added extras. Jesus uses different ways to talk about this concept. In chapter 14 he talks about home and peace.

Let's start with the concept of home. Chapter 14:1 & 2: *'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places.'*

We confuse ourselves with the first part of John 14 because we love to read it at funerals and comfort ourselves with thoughts of heaven. I don't think that's wrong as long as we don't forget the main point Jesus seems to be trying to make, which I believe is very much about how we are to live our lives today. Verse 23 says: "Jesus answered him, *'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.'*"

In the Bible, repetition is there for a reason. This word 'home' is the same word as the 'dwelling-places' in verse two. And we are being primed for chapter 15, where the word 'abide', repeated over and over again, until surely we have got it, is the root word for this word 'dwelling-place' or 'home'.

God is intent on making home with us. God's role in this was to die on the cross in order to fulfil the dictates of justice and to bridge that yawning gap between his holiness and our unholiness. Our role is to love God. And how do we set about doing this? We love one

another. Verse 23 again: Those who love me will keep my word. The word Jesus has just spoken and reiterates again and again in these chapters: A new commandment I give unto you love one another as I have loved you.



God is intent on making home with us. Our role is to love one another. This was introduced in chapter 13. Chapter 14 starts getting us into the idea of abiding. And we are now totally primed for chapter 15, the famous *'I am the vine. You are the branches. Abide in me'* chapter.

Have you noticed this progression in the 'I AM' statements of Jesus? It's a different sermon I know but previously to chapter 15 the 'I AM' statements helped us understand how Jesus is God. This 'I AM' statement does this and more.

It's the trinity with extras because, all of a sudden, we are included. I AM the vine. You are the branches. That's us. That's us cooperating in the great plan of salvation: God making home with us.

Repetition is always there for a purpose. Chapter 14 begins: *'Do not let your hearts be troubled.'* Just as John has expanded on the 'dwelling-places' he is now going to expand on peace. They were linked in verses 1&2 and they are linked now in today's passage.

Verse 27 says: *'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.'*

'Do not let your hearts be troubled' is repeated from the beginning of the chapter and then expanded: 'and do not let them be afraid'. Furthermore, it is matched with the two pairs at the beginning of the verse: 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.'

These types of matching couplets are a common format in the Bible, particularly in the Psalms. When they frame something, the question to ask is: What are they framing? Because that is usually the important bit, just as the picture is more important than the frame. In this case, the bit in the middle seems a little anti-climactic. 'I do not give to you as the world gives.'

How does Jesus give? How is it different from how the world gives? Now I know I preached this sermon last time but that is immediately where my brain went. To chapter 20. To that image of Jesus, holding out his scarred hands and saying, *'Peace be with you.'*

Peace be with you. I do not give as the world gives. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. The scars he bears, he bears for us and because of us. And the words out of his mouth are: Peace be with you. Then he tells the disciples, he tells us, that our mission is the same. We also are sent by God. Our message is peace and our method is forgiveness.

The poem 'Home' by Warsan Shire that I played at the beginning is a poem about how the world gives. A spiralling of greed and self-interest, bitterness and injustice, erupting into violence, catapulting people into another world, a world also governed by the same rules of greed and self-interest, bitterness and injustice. Just that no one is trying to kill them. At least not yet or not as often or not as overtly.

What is home? How do we abide with God? We love one another. We offer peace and forgiveness to one another just as Jesus has done for us. Our mission is the same as God's. We are his sent ones. Just as God is intent on making home with us, so we are called to extend the welcome of home to others. It's easy to extend this welcome to people like us. Jesus says: 'Of what credit is that to you?' His challenge to us is to extend this welcome to people not like us: to down and outs, to lawbreakers, to refugees.

In that image of Jesus holding out his scarred hands to us and declaring peace, we can see so clearly that he does not give as the world gives. And neither should we.