Hi,

Here’s today’s updates:

* My Monday class on Matthew will meet at 3pm today and my Tuesday class on Genesis will meet at noon tomorrow-- both on [my Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/scottengle).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.

What a horrifying week it has been. Where can we turn when the world seems full of sin and madness? To the Lord, our God, and strive, yet again, truly to abide in him.

**Psalm 121 (NRSV)**

**1I lift up my eyes to the hills— from where will my help come?**

**2My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.**

**3He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.**

**4He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.**

**5The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.**

**6The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night.**

**7The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.**

**8The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.**

**John 15:1-5 (NRSV)**

**“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.**

Psalm 121 is one of the most memorized psalms. It is sometimes called the traveler’s prayer and many of God’s people have prayed this psalm before journeys, seeking comfort in the knowledge that God is their guide and protector in all things. God’s faithfulness, his loving-kindness, is one of the most prominent themes in the Bible. Jesus draws on this theme and the oft-used metaphor of the vineyard to talk to his disciples about relationships that endure through all things and bear fruit for all things.

*The vineyard*

Our passage from John’s Gospel is part of Jesus’ farewell discourse (John 14-16) with his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion. Jesus’ hour has finally arrived and he tries to help his disciples understand what is about to happen. Here, Jesus draws upon the much-used metaphor of the vineyard.

Israel is a land of vineyards, thus we shouldn’t be surprised that it is a common biblical metaphor (see Isaiah 5:1-2, Psalm 80:8-9; Genesis 49:11-12,22 for example). The metaphor usually works like this. God plucked the people out of Egypt and planted them in Canaan, There, they, the vineyard, were to be fruitful and grow, but the vineyard turned bad (Isaiah 5:5-7) and God will come to judge and destroy the vineyard. But, as always, there are images of restoration and blessing alongside the images of judgment and destruction. In these images, the fertile vineyard is the blessed and restored Israel (Jeremiah 31:5; Amos 9:14).

In his last meal and talk with his disciples, Jesus reshapes the vineyard imagery around himself. He is the true vine. He is the true Israel, the fruitful vine that Israel had failed to be. Moreover, Jesus, as the true vine, exists in enduring relationship with the Father, who is the vinegrower, and with his disciples, who are the vine’s branches.

Step back from the words for a moment and picture a grapevine, all twisted and turning upon itself. It is hard to tell vine from branch or branch from branch. It is a whole, a unity, a community of sorts. It takes all three – the vinegrower, the vine, and the branches – to produce abundant fruit. The vinegrower continually prunes and shapes the vine, getting rid of dead branches and shaping the branches so they can bear more fruit. Grapevines will tend to grow lots of leaves and shoots that dissipate the vine’s energy and suppress the production of fruit. Thus, the vinegrower is always busy making sure that the vine is producing fruit and not just a pretty show of green leaves.

Jesus’ meaning seems clear. When the branches remain part of the vine, the branches can grow and thrive. If the branches are cut off from the vine, the branches wither and die. Likewise, we are to abide in Christ, just as he abides in us. It is only in Christ that we can find the life that we seek. As the vine gives life to the branches, Jesus is the giver of life.

It is important for us to realize that abiding in Jesus means much more than just believing or even trusting Christ. It is about remaining in union with Christ, in a deep and enduring relationship. This is how we are to *be*. Our very *being* is to be grounded in this oneness with Jesus. In Peterson’s paraphrase of John, Jesus says, “Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you.” First *being*, then *doing*.

*Producing fruit*

Jesus’ disciples are to bear fruit, but they can do so only by remaining in Christ. It is this deep union with our Lord that enables us to do what God would have us do. Without this deep and enduring relationship, we can do none of what God desires from us.

But what is this fruit that Jesus has in mind? Gail O’Day writes, “When John 15:2 is read in the light of 14:1-31, ‘bearing fruit’ emerges as another way to speak about the works of love that are required of Jesus followers (14:12, 15, 21, 23). The unproductive branches of which v. 2 speaks are those people within the Christian faith community who do not bear fruit in love.”

Further, O’Day writes, “The intermingling of the branches in the vine and the gardener’s attentive care to the fruitfulness of the branches create the quintessential visual image of the life of the Christian community that is shaped by love and grounded in God’s presence.” It is this life to which we are called as a community of disciples. Jesus’ metaphor of the vine teaches us yet again that there can be no healthy relationship with Jesus without a relationship with his church.

‘til tomorrow, grace and peace,

Scott