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 **Fruitful congregations ‘Prune’ (v.2)**

***Fruitful Congregations are led to lean forward into the future***

**Always Rooted**

By describing Himself as the ‘true vine’ (v.1), Jesus pictures Himself as the root and bearer of God’s life for the world. It is *in Him* that the Church finds the sure foundation from which it draws its life. It is *through Him* that God’s witness reaches out to the world around.

**Always Changing**

As the ‘gardener’ (v.1), the Father tends the growing life of His Church - always watching, tending and developing the branches to nurture health and grow His harvest. Vinedressers, like keen gardeners, are always ‘out there’ constantly tweaking, bringing on and developing their ‘patch’.

**Always Leaning Forward**

While always rooted in Christ, congregations should not be rooted in what they have always done and the ways they have always done it. It should be our expectation that the way we express the life and witness of the church should always be in the process of changing and developing. That will involve new things emerging that often require the pruning of other activities to allow for space for growth. As Jesus said, ‘every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful’. The alternative to such re-imagining, renewal and revitalisation of our congregational life is starkly expressed, the Father ‘cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit’ (v.2).

Like the vine grower that isn’t resting on last year’s crop, but is focused on next year’s harvest, congregations need to be forward leaning in their outlook. Leadership at congregational and organisational levels are key to developing this posture, but all members need to face up to the reality of change and the often personal pain caused by the kind of pruning Jesus expects to be an ongoing part of church life.

As society and the world around us changes rapidly, leaning back into the nostalgia of the past or being complacent about the present will not lead to fruitfulness. Fruitful Congregations are led to lean forward into the future however different or uncertain it feels.

*How does the act of pruning in the church’s life and witness sound and feel to you? Why might it sound like a bad idea?*

*Over the past number of years, what activities in the life and witness of our congregation have we pruned to allow us to grow in other areas?*

*How can we better take stock of all that we do in our church in an honest and forward looking way?*

*How much of the energy of our church life is absorbed by trying to maintain what we have in church life, compared to trying to develop witness to others who are still outside of Christ?*