

November 12 Congregational Sunday Preview: The Vine and Trellis

While I don't miss the traffic, prices, and politics of the DC Metro area, what I do miss are the beautifully serene vineyards tucked between the rolling hills of the Blue Ridge Mountain Valley in Loudoun County, VA. During the grind of a busy week and the crowded streets, Shannan and I [Picture] would sometimes sneak away for a day date to a vineyard, we'd bring our babies in the jogging stroller and wander among the grapevines or have a picnic.

[Title Slide] I'm fascinated by the winemaking process, called viticulture, and all that goes into harvesting these temperamental grape varieties. At the heart of successful viticulture, so I'm told, is the tending of the vine and the trellis. For the vine to grow strong and healthy grapes, it requires the proper trellis. The trellis provides the structural support so that the vine can grow in the right direction, receive optimal sunlight, and remain protected. For example, if the trellis is too small, unevenly spaced, or weak the vine will grow wild, wither, or be smothered by its own weight. Successful winemakers pay careful attention to the vital relationship between the vine and the trellis.

Learning about this fascinating process it is no surprise to me that the Bible is replete with vineyard imagery. In the Old Testament, Israel was often called God's vine or vineyard. In these passages, the health of the vineyard symbolized the spiritual state of God's people, either spiritually vital or withering. In the New Testament in John 15, Jesus refers to himself as the "true vine" (a reference as the ultimate fulfillment of Israel), the Father as the "vine keeper", and all those in Christ as "the branches". Our role as the branches is to remain in vital union with Jesus our vine so that we continue to grow and bear fruit. Again we see both in the Old and New Testament that the vineyard imagery speaks of spiritual vitality, growth and production.

If we extend this metaphor to the church as a whole, we can observe, praise God, that the vine is growing and bearing fruit. We see it in new people coming into our building, our worship services, baptisms, increase in unchurched or dechurched people, and people giving their lives to Christ, those experiencing belonging in the church for the first time, in healed marriages, people coming out of addiction and finding restoration in Jesus like in our Broken Beginnings ministry, gospel proclamation out in our community, our partnership ministries, the ministry to children, teens, on and on we could share, and you will hear more today about vine work from others...This is all vine. As a church, **the vine growth IS our mission: To introduce people to Jesus Christ and help them follow him.** It is Jesus' goal for the church and so it is our goal to bear more and more fruit. This is why as a church leadership team and our awesome ministry teams, we are all committed to the health of the vine so that we can bear more and more fruit.

And while the focus ought to be on the vine growth, what we often don't talk about is the trellis [Picture] that vitally supports all that vine growth. It's often behind the scenes, even in the Scriptures the trellis is behind the scenes, but a strong trellis is critical to the mission of vine growth isn't it? Without a strong trellis supporting, and working with and propping up the vine of ministry, fruit production will be limited, and even the weight of the vine can collapse on

itself. This is why it is also vital that we not only tend to the vine, but also tend to the trellis- We have to pay attention to the trellis' of our facilities, financial resources, systems and technology, committees...and let me tell you these vital trellis workers rarely are seen and appreciated: but they are critical. Trellis workers like Len Armstrong, our Business Manager, Seth Stein our Facilities Manager, Andrew Wallace who is critical to our facilities team, Christian DeLaCuba our Technical Director and Dave Hutton his right-hand man, along with the entire media team, and Christy Lapp our Manager of Communications and all our paid and volunteer administration team and Nursery and Child Care coordinators and workers, and everyone who serves on committees...these are the trellis workers. Can we thank them together?!

And so, for the health and production of the vine we must also tend to the trellis that supports that vine. And this is why **our #1 asset as a church are our people (vine work) But our second greatest asset is our facility**, the primary trellis that supports the vine. For those of you who are new in the last few years, and as a refresher for all of us, it's important to know a little history with the building you are in. 15 years ago the worship center, adult education space and the lobby were constructed, giving us the room to grow both spiritually and numerically. This was a significant undertaking and many made sacrifices to bring this to fruition. As a leadership team, we take financial stewardship seriously, and we made a commitment to paying off our debt, which meant making a commitment to forego some ministry expenses, needed staffing and improvements in other areas to cut expenses while also calling our church to the vision of being debt free. By God's grace, in 2021 we accomplished our goal of becoming debt free! This enabled us to expand our ministry team Pastor Hayes and Pastor Terry, and go after our ministry vision with greater intentionality: vision we call **Brandywine "On the Move"** that has three core areas of focus: **Building our Faith- Making Resilient Disciples, Reaching our Community, and Shaping our Future.**

The first two areas are really focused on vine work, but the third core area is focused on the trellis of our facilities. Because while our building project 15 years ago addressed some of the key areas of our facility, there are other areas of our facility that haven't been improved since the Reagan administration...and are in critical need of attention: The three primary areas: Our children's space, community gathering areas and building exterior/outdoor space. And if we don't address these areas of our trellis, we are in danger of stifling vine growth and future fruit production. And let me just say, what great problem to have! Many churches sadly are trying to figure out how to keep their facility open, renting their space out because no one is coming...but we have the complete opposite problem! Praise God! But even great problems are still problems. In order for the vine to continue to grow and produce fruit for many years to come, our leadership has developed a plan to repack and redesign these areas our existing facility over the next few years. We are calling this our **"Shaping the Future Initiative"**. Our three shaping the future priorities are Redesigning **the childrens ministry space** with the goal of turning the East Wing into our Childrens wing with redesigned classrooms and community rooms that can serve all our children and the future needs for growth, the **Entry Level Community Space**: doubling our current space and providing relief to our Lobby, and the **Building Exterior** which needs to be repainted and a more cohesive design, and providing more exterior space for community. We aren't talking about slapping some paint on the walls, freshening up the carpets...that doesn't

address our current and future needs, and it certainly isn't doing it with excellence, relevance and innovation: which is one of our core values: Because we believe God deserves our best and so do people. And we believe the relationship between the vine and the trellis is key to the future success of our mission. This is a stewardship issue.

Remember Jesus' parable of the Talents? The master of a property gives his workers a stewardship: various amounts of money to invest and be productive with while he is away. Two are responsible and invest well to which the master says, ²¹ *'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.'* However, one servant out of fear does nothing with the responsibility he has been given, he just buries it, let's just say the master isn't happy with him. At the end Jesus says ²⁹ *For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.* To whom much is given, much will be required. God has given us a growing vineyard, and productive vines...praise the Lord. But that growing vineyard is a stewardship that we are responsible to invest in for greater fruit, greater kingdom production. We can either, out of fear of the cost, fear of the sacrifice, all the what ifs...we can sit on this responsibility and say "good enough" OR we can invest what God has entrusted to us and go for it, really go for it for the opportunity for abundant fruit in our future. I don't know about you, but as your Lead Pastor I'm not interested in "Good enough" let's just keep status quo. No...Which means that it will take all of us, big and small, working together, sacrificing together, to strengthen our trellis for the good of the vine growth. And I believe God is with us and has been with us because we are being serious stewards of his mission to reach people for Christ and help them follow him. What have we been saying, even when paying off all that debt in the past? *"God's work, done God's way, will never lack God's supply."* In just a few minutes, Executive Pastor Todd Johnson is going share more details about our "Shaping the Future" designs and process.

But before I hand it over to him, I want to share with you just one new area of vine growth that God is calling us to, that ties into our facility redesign needs. That area is *"Disability and Special Needs Ministry."* Over the last couple years it has become clear to our leadership team that God is calling us to cultivate this critical need. One, we have had an increase in children and families who have disabilities and special needs coming through the doors of our church and getting involved, which means we have a responsibility to serve them with the love of Jesus. Two, there are very few churches in our area that have the capacity to serve these families, which means many of these families are quite literally unable to come to church. What an opportunity! Three, the Lord in his providential timing called a team together with the passion and gifting to lead us in this way. And the leaders of that team...I know I'm not supposed to have favorites...but are some of my favorite people- David and Nancy Cordrey. I want to invite them up to introduce themselves and share briefly why they are passionate about this ministry and how you can be involved.