



Create a peaceful space to pause, and allow yourself to feel God's presence alongside you, as near to you as your own breath. In following the reflection below, as a church we will draw closer to God and to one another as we grow in faith and deepen our sense of belonging to God.

Matthew 7:15-20 'Good Trees Bearing Good Fruit'

¹⁵ "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. ¹⁶ You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus you will know them by their fruits.

'False news' is a phrase that's sprung into prominence over the past few years, and to some people it would seem that it no longer matters how many lies you tell. But although the phrase is new, the phenomenon isn't. 2000 years ago Jesus himself was concerned about it: "Beware of false prophets," he said, then went on to give us good advice, "You shall know them by their fruits".

On 1st April half a century ago now, our young daughters balanced a large bunch of bananas on an apple tree in the garden and gleefully 'caught out' their father, who played along beautifully with their April Fool. Bananas growing on apple trees!

Jesus asked, "Are grapes gathered from thorns?" Not such a stupid question as it sounds, perhaps, because there was a certain thorn, the buckthorn, which had little black berries not unlike grapes – look at the picture opposite and you can see how similar they are. "Or figs from thistles?" – again there was a certain thistle which had a flower which might well be taken for that of a fig tree.

The point Jesus was making was real and important. There may be a superficial resemblance between the true and the false prophet. The false prophet may wear the right clothes and use the right language, but just as you can't sustain life with the berries of the blackthorn, and the flowers of the thistle don't predict that edible fruit will follow, so the life of the soul can never be sustained with the food which a false prophet offers.

The real test of any teaching is, does it strengthen us to bear the burdens of life and

to walk in the way in which we ought to go. The Good News that Jesus revealed should be transformational – it's not enough for us just to be nice people. Are we growing in the way of Jesus as he has taught us in the Sermon on the Mount? Are we growing in righteousness? Is our behaviour more holy – more pure? Do we consider others before ourselves? Do our lives display transparent humility? Are we growing in truthfulness, love, and generosity?

In the Gospel passage above, Jesus tells us to look out for false prophets; but we should also look inwards and check our own fruit. We must be honest and ruthless in our self-evaluation. Are we really following Jesus through the narrow gate that leads to life?



Prayer:

Heavenly Father,
help us to discern the true from the false.
We pray that you give us all an increasing experience of your life-giving Spirit,
a growing awareness in ourselves of the fruits of that Spirit and a deepening assurance of your presence with each one of us. Give us, too, a strong conviction of revealed truth and a holy boldness to make it known. May we all work together to build up the body of Christ to the glory of your great name.
In Jesus name we pray. Amen.