



ON THE GRAPEVINE

Ebenezer and Pantymwyn

Broad sheet April 2019

Why 'On the Grapevine'?

The expression, 'On the Grapevine' was used in connection with the Underground Railroad, a network that helped slaves from the southern states escape to British North America (now Canada) and freedom in the late 1700s until the mid-19th century. The grapevine was the Underground Railroad's communications system, which was also known as the 'clothesline telegraph'. Different coloured clothes were hung out on clotheslines as codes, which passed information along the network. This could be used not only for helping slaves escape, but for espionage, warning slaves of the progress of their pursuers.

Grapevines may have been used as a substitute for rope, presumably for clotheslines, so that the two expressions came to be used at the same time. There was a series of posts or stations. Those stations would have been the homes of people friendly to the cause, many of whom were Quakers. They would give food and shelter to escapees and send them on their journey north to Ontario (Upper Canada) or south to Mexico. The escape route to Mexico closed 1821 when Florida ceased to be a Spanish territory and joined the American states.

This seems to be the origin of today's saying 'I heard it on the Grapevine' meaning information being passed from person to person. We are hoping that this broadsheet will be a grapevine to pass on the Good News of Jesus Christ in much the same way as the friends of escaping slaves used their grapevines. Our aim is to be a station where souls may be refreshed by the message of the love of God operating in our area and warned of temptations that pursue God's people until we escape sin's slavery and arrive at the place God has prepared for us.

There is another reason for giving this broadsheet the name 'On the Grapevine'. As Dave Roberts, (who drew the logo above) pointed out, Christ is the vine and we are the branches. God is growing our local grapevine. It is developing more branches alongside the Ebenezer branch: Pen-y-Ffôn, Grace Denbigh, Pantymwyn (PVHC), The Temple Mynydd Iŷa, Grace Buckley, and Llay. Hopefully, as time goes by, we will be able to include news of growth and blessing in all these congregations.

John 15:1-8 (NIV) The Vine and the Branches

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

Bible Study Read John 15: 1-8 and fill in the blanks

Jesus said that he is the _____. My Father is the _____. He _____ off every branch that does not grow _____. He _____ every branch that does _____ fruit so that it will grow _____ fruit. You cannot grow fruit if you do not _____ in me. If we do not remain in Jesus Christ we are like a _____ that _____ away and is thrown in the fire where it is _____ up. If we stay in Jesus his _____ will stay in us and we will _____ for the Father's glory. (Turn to next page)

Shirley Williams 1934-2019:

an abridged version of the Eulogy given by family friend, Clive Rotherham, at Shirley's funeral 5th March 2019

Shirley Williams was one of the most remarkable women I have had the privilege of knowing. Through going to youth club run by Debra, I started visiting their house – in 1965. I always thought it was because of Debra that I became a Christian – and it was! But, looking back, I realise it was also Shirley who introduced me to Christ, always supporting, welcoming, feeding, sharing her home, her family and her life.

Shirley perfected the art of the elastic dinner – a cross between a stew, a casserole and a soup, to which more of whatever was available could be added; almost like the widow's cruse of oil, it never ran out. Shirley taught me to eat - I would eat things I never ate at home, and I would wash up!

Another of Shirley's specialities was fly cakes – otherwise known as currant buns. She must have baked an endless supply because these would appear whenever people called and were a mainstay of our after-church Sunday evening youth meetings at the Williams' house.

Shirley Williams embodied generosity, faithfulness and compassion. One event epitomises her character for me. It concerns Eric and Jimmy. Picture this. You live in a small 3-bedroomed house with your husband, five children, aged 2 to 10 years old, and several cats. Late one night, your husband who has been out at a Christian coffee bar, arrives home with two disreputable-looking men who've been sleeping rough. Your husband says that they need beds for the night. And so, you take them in. They stay for many months, sleeping in the boys' bedroom while all five of your children sleep in the other bedroom. They regularly come home at night drunk (Jimmy and Eric, that is, not the children). And, from the point of view of those who visit, like me, you do all this without complaint or resentment. This was Shirley Williams. The outcome? Does it matter? Shirley and Debra did this out of love – not to make converts. In the end, Eric was a changed man and married a woman called Val. Jimmy went and gave himself up to the police.

Shirley was a woman of her word. She said what she meant and meant what she said. And you would always know what she meant because her English grammar and enunciation were impeccable. Shirley loved words and many a happy hour was spent, often over the teatime spread, discussing such vital issues as 'Is peccable the opposite of impeccable?' 'If gruesome means particularly horrible, what is grous?' And idiosyncrasies of the English language such as 'if we say ratio, why not ratio? [gashio]' Shirley was a woman who would never say less when she meant fewer.

Shirley took to growing old with contentment. You might expect such a fiercely independent person to bemoan the fact that she could no longer cope on her own and would have to move into a care home. Not a bit of it! This was where God had placed her and she enjoyed being cared for after so many years of looking after others. Shirley saw her children grow up and have their own offspring. She finally saw some great-grandchildren. Ultimately, Shirley accepted that there was more than one way to raise a child. She even told Glyn that she had been wrong. One of the last things Shirley told Chris and me, in January this year, was that she was very proud of all her family.

When Shirley was diagnosed with cancer, she refused treatment, and soon retired to her bed. But Shirley wasn't a defeatist resigned to the inevitability of death. No, hers was a recognition that her race was run and a desire to depart and 'be with her Lord'. It wasn't a rejection of this life or of those she loved and her heart's longing was that they would find joy and peace in each other's company and her in her Lord and Saviour. Shirley Williams passed away with faith undiminished and in peace and in the warmth and embrace of her family. And it is my privilege to have known this remarkable woman.

Bible Study cont'd: Read Galatians 5:22-23

The fruit of the Spirit is 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____
4. _____ 5. _____ 6. _____
7. _____ 8. _____ 9. _____

Think! What does it mean to remain in Jesus Christ? How does having God's word in our hearts and minds help us grow fruit? Have you ever felt 'pruned'? How does the Holy Spirit help us?

Note: If we are not yet attached to the vine we cannot grow. Being sorry for our sin and trusting that Jesus died for our sin and rose again for our justification grafts us to Christ or 'on the vine' and gives us a fruitful life for God's glory.

