

# It's a Gardener's World!

We are blessed to have farmers who work the soil, plant and tend the crops, harvest fruits and vegetables and ship beautiful produce to our markets for our health and enjoyment.

Today's parable tells the story about a landowner who planted a vineyard & asked the tenants to take care of the plants. The landowner expected that at harvest time he would receive the 'fruits' from his fields from the tenants. The tenants grew grapes, but they did not want to share what they had grown. At this time of year there are few vines that are as exquisitely coloured as the good old Virginia Creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*). It's a vigorous grower & it can carpet whole walls, turning them into a vision of scarlet and russet, lime green and gold, before the leaves drop off and everything returns to normal. There's a wonderful blanket of this spectacular plant alongside the NFU Insurance building, on the path leading from College Square to Northfield Drive.



'*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*' is a type of tendril climbing plant belonging to the grape family & is native to North America. The name derives from the Greek 'parthenos' (virgin) and the Latin 'kissos' (ivy). The reason being the plant's ability to form seeds without pollination. Unfortunately, in the UK it is far from its original home in North America, and is a Schedule 9 species – this means that it is illegal to plant Virginia creeper in the wild, and if planted in a garden it is expected that 'reasonable measures will be taken to confine (the plant) to the cultivated area to prevent their spreading to the wider environment'. To say that it is enthusiastic would be an understatement! Its tendrils end in adhesive-like tips, giving this vine the ability to cement itself to walls and therefore need no support. The presence of adhesive tips instead of penetrating rootlets also means it doesn't damage buildings the way some vines do. The problem is that it can quickly swamp other plants so keeping it under control is worth the effort. Virginia creeper first arrived in the UK in 1629, and seems to have been covering our walls and stately homes ever since.

Virginia creeper is a plant that generates profoundly different opinions among gardeners. Some call it desirable. Some call it invasive, while others mistakenly call it poison ivy.

In years past, children learned a rhyme to help distinguish Virginia Creeper from the somewhat similar-looking and highly toxic Poison Ivy: "Leaves of three, let it be; Leaves of five, let it thrive." Poison Ivy leaflets are normally in groups of three, while those of the Virginia Creeper are in groups of five (*quinquefolia*).

The reason for the urgency in distinguishing these two plants is of course the fact that poison ivy produces a toxin that is seriously harmful to most people. Virginia Creeper is not poisonous, but the sap of the plant can cause skin irritation and rashes in some people.

But why do plants climb at all? The great advantage of being a climber is that you don't have to waste a lot of energy growing a structural support such as a trunk – you can find a tree that's already done all the work (or a rock or telegraph pole or wall) and use that as a way of accessing light and keeping your tender growing shoots out of the way of passing herbivores. Many climbing plants originated in tropical

areas, where dense vegetation meant that they had to be able to grow even in relative darkness, until they reached a height where they could 'see' the light.

Darwin was intrigued by climbing plants, and wrote a book about them. He concluded that *'It has often been vaguely asserted that plants are distinguished from animals by not having the power of movement. It should rather be said that plants acquire and display this power only when it is of some advantage to them; this being of comparatively rare occurrence, as they are affixed to the ground, and food is brought to them by the air and rain.'*

And so it is with the Virginia creeper: it is not until the leaves start taking on their autumn hues that we can appreciate how far and how fast it has grown in the course of a season.

Jesus uses the story of the Tenants to teach us that when we hear about the miracle of God's love he expects that our lives will bloom and grow, bearing beautiful fruits of the spirit such as kindness, love, and joy. It is expected that we will want to share the fruits of God's love so that others can enjoy and benefit from that love.

Jesus tells us this story to help us 'see the light' - to understand that, like the landowner, God has trusted us with something special - his Kingdom here on Earth. He is looking for us to "give back" to him the important things we do with our lives - our loving, our sharing and helping. May we be good stewards of his Kingdom & live lives that might be pleasing to Him.