

St John's Church, Kingston Park Sunday Worship, 2nd May 2021

(If you are worshipping with others, words for all to say together are in **bold type**.)

Welcome to worship with St John's Church.

Jesus said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit." (John 15:5) Later on, we'll be thinking about what it means for Jesus to be the true vine, and for us to remain in him as branches of the vine.

Our first song calls us all to worship our risen King, and to rejoice in his love and mercy.

Song: Come people of the risen king. (This can be found on YouTube here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9j07fbld3uY&list=RD9j07fbld3uY&start_radio=1)

Come people of the Risen King
Who delight to bring Him praise
Come all and tune your hearts to sing
To the Morning Star of grace
From the shifting shadows of the earth
We will lift our eyes to Him
Where steady arms of mercy reach
To gather children in

Come those whose joy is morning sun
And those weeping through the night
Come those who tell of battles won
And those struggling in the fight
For His perfect love will never change
And His mercies never cease
But follow us through all our days
With the certain hope of peace

*Rejoice rejoice let every tongue rejoice
One heart, one voice
O Church of Christ rejoice*

Come young and old from ev'ry land
Men and women of the faith
Come those with full or empty hands
Find the riches of His grace
Over all the world His people sing
Shore to shore we hear them call
The truth that cries through ev'ry age
Our God is all in all

(Keith & Kristyn Getty, Stuart Townend)

Gathering prayer

*For his perfect love will never change and his mercies never cease
But follow us through all our days with the certain hope of peace.*

God our loving, merciful Father,
We come to you as members of your family and as those who long to know you better.
We come to bring you our love and our praise.
We come to speak to you and to listen to you,
To hear your Word, and to learn what your Spirit teaches.
Open our hearts and our minds to what you have to say to us this morning,
Help us to worship you sincerely,
And draw us closer to you, so that we may love you more. **Amen.**

Prayer of thanks

Later, there will be time to pray for the needs of others and our own needs. But we shouldn't forget to thank God for the many ways he shows us his love and mercy, as he provides for our needs, and helps in life's challenging situations, and gives us many other blessings. Even with so much going on in the world, there is much to be thankful for.

So let's take a few moments to think of some things that we want to thank God for this week. You may want to do this in silence, but if you are with others, and you would like also to share these things or to say your own prayers of thanks, please do take the time to do that.

(A time of silence or sharing.)

Loving Father, all good things come from you, and we thank you for the many ways you care for us and bless us. Above all, we thank you that you sent Jesus to be our Saviour, and to bring us into new life and a new relationship with you. May we always have thankful hearts, and never forget your blessings. In Jesus' name, **Amen**.

Bible Reading: John 15:1-8 (NIV)

¹ I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² 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. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ 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.

⁵ 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. ⁶ 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. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Reflection

Today's reading comes from Jesus' last evening with his disciples, when he was preparing them for a future when he would no longer be with them. It contains one of Jesus's 'I am' sayings – "I am the true vine."

There's quite a lot about vines and vineyards in the Bible. They were important for food and wine, and if you were sitting under your vine and your fig tree, you were enjoying a peaceful life. But also, in the Old Testament, a vine or a vineyard is used to represent Israel, God's special people. Psalm 80:8-18 describes Israel as a vine that God took out of Egypt and planted. Isaiah 5 talks about Israel as a vineyard that only bore bad fruit, despite the care God lavished on it. That meant it had turned away from God, and wasn't fulfilling its true purpose of being a blessing to the whole world by making God known. So when Jesus said 'I am the true vine,' he was saying that he was the real thing – he was the one who would fulfil God's purposes. And if his followers remained in him, they would be members of God's true people.

Jesus says that it is essential to remain in him. A branch has to be connected to the main stem if it's to receive the moisture and nutrients it needs – otherwise, it will die, and never bear any fruit. The whole plant includes many branches. Remaining in the vine, in Jesus, means keeping close to him, spending time with him, getting to know him through prayer and worship and reading the Bible, and letting his Spirit transform us. But it also means being part of God's people today, part of the Christian community. We need him, and we need each other.

But Jesus also talks about pruning. "He takes away every branch that does not bear fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the word that I have spoken to you." There's a bit of a play on words going on here, because the Greek word that's used for 'prune' is closely related to the word that means 'clean'. His disciples have already received some pruning, as their lives have been shaped by Jesus' teaching.

Jesus' disciples would have known how you looked after a grape vine. They were everywhere. But they're not so common in the North-East of England, and I am no gardener, so I found a Youtube

video* of a lady with a vineyard. She pruned her vines when they were bare of leaves, and she showed us how to recognise where the new growth would come from. Then she cleaned the vine by taking out all the dead wood, and she pruned the parts that could bear fruiting stems. She took out spurs that weren't needed or were in the wrong place, and she cut back the ones that she was keeping until they were just a few inches long and only had a couple of buds on them – rather like pruning your roses. It looked very drastic! But if you don't cut it back, then the plant has to put its energy into supporting lots of wood and leaves, and it tries to make too many grapes. The fruit is small and not as sweet, and it's more likely to be diseased. The vinedresser prunes the vine to get a better crop, and to shape the vine so it can continue to bear fruit year on year. So pruning is good for the plant, and it allows all the nutrients that come up from the stem of the vine to be used where they'll do most good – in producing luscious bunches of good grapes.

And God, our gardener, prunes us, if we are fruitful branches. We may become aware of things in our lives that aren't helpful – things we do, or maybe attitudes, that are hurtful or wrong, and aren't pleasing to God. Those have to go. Sometimes, pruning comes through difficult experiences – things that may challenge us or distress us at the time, but God works through them to help us grow Christian character. Or sometimes, what has to go is good wood – things that of themselves are fine, but aren't what he is calling us to now, or take up time that we don't really have. Perhaps it's things that are making us spread ourselves too thinly, and harming us by the strain they put on us. So he may ask us to give up the good, in favour of His best – and that can happen to churches, too. Or perhaps pruning happens when things we value aren't there, for whatever reason, and we're cast back on God's resources. The months of lockdown may have been frustrating, but perhaps they've also been an opportunity to think about what's really important in life, or to develop our relationship with God. And remember, though the idea of pruning may seem frightening, the hand holding the knife belongs to the father who loves us dearly, and is seeking to make us the best we can be, growing more and more like Jesus.

And that brings us to the fruit that we are to bear. What does it mean for a Christian to be fruitful? Jesus was preparing his closest followers for the mission that they would soon begin, to take the good news of Jesus to the whole world, and to make disciples for him, and that's what's mainly meant here. It's important for us, too: we're also called to share the good news through our words and our lives, and we pray that people will see Jesus and come to believe in him because of us. But that's not the only kind of fruit that the Bible speaks of. In Isaiah 5, what God looks for in his vineyard is justice and righteousness, and Paul, in Colossians 1:10, speaks of 'bearing fruit in every good deed'. So surely, whenever we are obeying God and serving faithfully in the ways he has prepared for us, that is the fruit of our life in Him. When we serve other people, and treat others fairly, or speak up for someone who's being treated unjustly, or when *you* do whatever it is that he's called *you* to, we are living out our calling as his disciples – and that is the fruit that comes from being joined to the true vine. And of course, the New Testament tells us of the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) – the character that grows when we allow the Spirit to work in us, and we grow in love, and peace, and kindness, and goodness, and faithfulness, and self-control. Those too come about as we remain in a living relationship with our Lord.

So let us hang on tight to Jesus, the true vine, and be fruitful branches in whatever way he wants. Amen.

Prayers

God of love, we thank you for the way you care for each one of us, and that you can use even difficult circumstances for our good.

We pray for those who are worried or afraid today:

For those who are worried about loved ones.

For those who are worried about their own health.

For those who are worried about the future, and especially for those in this area who have learned that their jobs are to be lost.

Lord, you know how best to meet their needs and calm their anxieties. We pray that you will provide for them, and may the knowledge of your love help them not to fear.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those affected by COVID, and today we especially remember those in countries that are finding it hard to deal with the pandemic. We pray for India, that the health system there will receive the resources it needs to treat the patients who come to it; and for the countries that have not yet secured enough vaccines, that these will be made available. And we pray for all those who care for the sick, that you will be their strength and shield, and they will have the resources and the rest that they need.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Our Lord Jesus healed the sick and turned nobody away. We pray for those who are ill, and those who are bereaved. Lord, strengthen and heal those who are unwell, and comfort those who mourn. We lift up to you especially those we name in silence now.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for our own walk with you. Teach us what it means to remain in Christ, and how much we depend on Him. Help us to trust in your loving care when pruning time comes, and help us to stay close, so that we may bear fruit in our character, in our witness, and in all that we do to share your love and the peace and justice of your kingdom.

Lord, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

We draw all our prayers together in the prayer that Jesus taught us.

**Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.**

Song: My Jesus, My Saviour. Our final song of praise reminds us that 'Nothing compares to the promise I have in You.' You may want to listen on Youtube here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jABSW-UuT1o> or you may prefer simply to read the words as praise.

My Jesus, my Saviour
Lord there is none like you
All of my days, I want to praise
The wonders of your mighty love
My comfort, my shelter
Tower of refuge and strength
Let every breath, all that I am
Never cease to worship You

Shout to the Lord, all the earth let us sing
Power and majesty, praise to the King
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar
At the sound of Your name
I sing for joy at the work of your hands
Forever I'll love you, forever I'll stand
Nothing compares to the promise I have In You.

Darlene Zschech

Closing prayers.

Father, you have placed us in your Son, the True Vine.
May we always remain in him, holding firm in faith and love,
So that we may bear fruit in our lives and bring glory to you as his disciples. **Amen**

The Lord bless us and watch over us,
the Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us,
the Lord look kindly on us and give us peace;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be among us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

(Common Worship)

* The vineyard video can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pv-n2Bolps0>).

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