



Worship at Home – Fifth Sunday of Easter – 2nd May

Father God help us to come to you this morning with open and thankful hearts. Fill us with the joy and peace that comes with knowing you. Be with us as we walk in your light, rejoice in your love and reflect your glory.

Amen

Hymn 680: This Joyful Eastertide

Welcome

The Lord be with you,
and also with you

Prayer of Preparation

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen

Prayer of Confession

Our Lord Jesus Christ said: The first commandment is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is the only Lord. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbour as yourself". There is no other commandment greater than these. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Amen. Lord, have mercy.

Let us confess our sins in penitence and faith, firmly resolved to keep God's commandments and to live in love and peace with all.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and against our neighbour in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name. Amen

Lord have mercy

Lord have mercy

Christ have mercy
Christ have mercy
Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy

Almighty God, who forgives all who truly repent, have mercy upon you, pardon and deliver you from all your sins, confirm and strengthen you in all goodness and keep you in life eternal through Jesus Christ our lord. **Amen**

Collect

Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: grant that, as by your grace going before us you put into our minds good desires, so by your continual help we may bring them to good effect; through Jesus Christ our risen Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

New Testament Reading: Acts 8: 26 - end

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it.' So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

'Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.'

The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?' He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Hymn 718: We love the place

Gospel Reading:

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John

Glory to you, O Lord

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ

Sermon: Revd Petra Shakeshaft

I am the True Vine and my Father is the Vine Grower.

This passage is a small part of what is known as the Farewell Discourse. Just a reminder of the context:

Jesus has washed the disciples' feet and has returned to the table where he foretells both Judas' betrayal and Peter's threefold denial. Jesus begins the discourse with words of reassurance and challenge and here, we come to this familiar image of Jesus as the vine. I am the True vine. Jesus throws us back into the depths of the Old Testament Prophets and Psalmist where Israel is referred to as the vineyard and God as the Vine-grower and it has been pointed out that by one commentator, that in the original Greek of John's Gospel, Jesus actually says, *I am the true vineyard and my Father is the vine-grower*, which means we are the vines, not the branches. If we hold on to that thought, it is we who are pruned and not Jesus. And that makes a difference.

This is a passage about Spiritual Formation and the key word that occurs throughout John's Gospel is 'Abide'.

The Greek is *menai* – and is also sometimes translated as stay, or rest. Here it is abide.

Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me

Abiding is not visiting, or staying for a while, but being in a deep and intimate relationship with Jesus who is in a deep and intimate relationship with the Father – this is what he wants for his disciples; to share in that intimacy with the Father. It's a conversational relationship – not speaking out loud necessarily, but held in those moments of meeting with, speaking with others, in life events, in creativity, music, walking in beautiful places, growing things, those things that nourish us, give us life; those places we meet Christ, glimpse him in our daily activity as well as in our times of attentive prayer and praise. Those are the places of growth we must cultivate and feed or we wither and die.

I remember twice being asked the same question about three years apart; once by my vocations advisor and later whilst I was training for ministry by my Spiritual Director and both times being reduced to tears:

What makes you grow?

Art I said.

Then you must do it – they both said

They were both right. I know that I am diminished if I am not being creative. I know that part of me withers and dies.

What is it that gives you life?

The last year has been challenging for all of us in different ways and the months ahead are going to be challenging as we reconvene and begin to reflect of what we have learned and what has been lost. Many of the things that are life-giving have been stripped away and we are longing to be together, to hug loved ones or to find solitude, to celebrate and, for some, to grieve together. All of us have been changed by living through this experience; some will have grown, others will have diminished.

What gives you life?

I am the vineyard and My Father is the vine-grower.

Jesus is the soil in which we are planted; the nourishment, the love in which we grow and flourish. the source of that love is the flow of love between the Father and the Son into which we are drawn and become part of when we abide in him.

I and the Father are one, says Jesus, As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Spiritual Formation is never for our own sakes, but so that we may display God's glory to the world; to the unbelieving world. We are cleansed and pruned that we might bear fruit:

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit, fruit that will abide – there it is again, sometimes translated as *fruit that will last*.

And what does that fruit look like? In the verses immediately following this morning's passage Jesus says this,

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

This is the fruitfulness which should be apparent in us as a community of disciples; that we love one another and that we show that love to the world. The fruitfulness is not about how we feel or just about our relationship with God, it's a call to action and that action is – to – love – It's a call to turn away from those things that drain the life from us, a call to turn away from the things that draw us away from God, the things that cause us to be less than loving. We cannot do it alone, we are utterly dependent on the life-giving flow of love from the Vineyard and the Vine-grower.

There is one more thing about this passage which makes it an Easter season passage for me.

John's gospel begins with the words

In the beginning was the Word and the Word was God and the was with God.

John sets out the whole premise of the gospel in that first verse. The Word (which becomes flesh in Jesus) is God and is also the author of creation; it is his light which God speaks at the first moment of creation and his breath that breathes life into the world the garden of creation.

He is both Vineyard and Vine-grower. He is the gardener. So when Mary Magdalene meets the unrecognisable figure in the Garden on that first Easter morning and supposes him to be the gardener, we all suppose her to be wrong, but she is right, so, so right. He *is* the gardener. He is the Creator God, who gives you life.

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one Being with the Father; through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation he came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and was made man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayers

The Peace

Take a moment and offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for each other and our church family church community. Maybe call or text someone who would enjoy sharing the peace with you.

May the God of peace make you perfect and holy, that you may be kept safe and blameless in spirit, soul and body, for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

And also with you.

Hymn 216: God is love: his the care

Lord's Prayer

**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.

Remembering the Lord's Supper

Take a moment to remember the final meal that Jesus shared with his disciples. As we think about this meal - with the washing of feet and bread and wine shared with friends - we remember Jesus' offering of himself on the cross. We rejoice in his resurrection from the dead and look forward to the coming of God's Kingdom. While we cannot receive Christ in the sacraments in the usual way, we can be the presence of Christ in our homes and communities, and we can be a praying presence wherever we are.

Hymn 77: Blest are the pure in heart

Closing Prayer

Lord God, we thank you for this time of worship; may your love and peace remain with us in the coming days. Be with us in all that we will think, say and do so that our lives may reflect your glory. We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord

In the name of Christ. Amen