

## **Worship for Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021 Easter 5**

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### **Call to Worship      Psalm 118 v 26, 27 & 29**

*May God bless the one who comes in the name of the LORD!  
From the Temple of the LORD we bless you.  
The LORD is God; he has been good to us.  
Give thanks to the LORD, because he is good, and his love is eternal.*

With love, we will worship and adore our God.  
With love, we will listen to his word for us.  
With love, we will offer our lives to him.  
We love him, because he first loved us.

### **Hymn: StF 103 God is Love, let heaven adore him**

- 1 God is Love: let heaven adore him; God is Love: let earth rejoice;  
let creation sing before him, and exalt him with one voice.  
He who laid the earth's foundation, he who spread the heav'ns above,  
he who breathes through all creation, he is Love, eternal Love.
- 2 God is Love: and he, enfolding all the world in one embrace,  
with unfailing grasp is holding every child of every race.  
And when human hearts are breaking under sorrow's iron rod,  
then they find that self same aching deep within the heart of God.
- 3 God is Love, and though with blindness  
sin afflicts each human soul,  
God's eternal loving-kindness holds and guides  
and keeps them whole.  
Sin and death and hell shall never o'er us final triumph gain;  
God is Love, so Love for ever o'er the universe must reign.

*Timothy Rees (1874-1939)*

### **Prayer of Adoration**

God of Love we adore you.  
Love spoke, and creation came into being.  
Love spoke, and everything came from nothing.  
Love speaks to us, saying 'Love me,  
And you will know the love at the heart of the universe.'

God of Love we adore you.  
Love spoke in parables and words of hope and healing.  
Love spoke forgiveness to those condemned and despised.

- 2 Let love be real, not grasping or confining,  
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;  
that helps us face the risk of truly living,  
and makes us brave to be what we might be.  
Give me your strength when all my words are weakness,  
give me your love in spite of all you know:  
as God loves us, so let us love each other,  
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.
- 3 Let love be real, with no manipulation,  
no secret wish to harness or control;  
let us accept each other's incompleteness,  
and share the joy of learning to be whole.  
Give me your hope through dreams and disappointments,  
give me your trust when all my failings show:  
as God loves us, so let us love each other,  
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.

*Michael Forster (born 1946)*

### **Dismissal**

Live in joy and peace,  
Sustained by the Love of God shown in Christ Jesus,  
And bear the fruit that feeds those hungry for love and life. Amen.

### **Blessing**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,  
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us  
and with all whom we love, today and always. Amen

Love speaks to us, saying 'Love me,  
And you will know the saving love that is real life.'

God of Love we adore you.  
Love spoke in fiery tongues that all could understand.  
Love spoke good news to the lost and loveless.  
Love speaks to us, saying, 'Love me,  
And you will know that I live within your heart.'

Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we love and adore you. Amen.

### **Psalm 1 v 1 – 3**

Happy are those who reject the advice of evil people,  
who do not follow the example of sinners  
or join those who have no use for God.  
Instead, they find joy in obeying the Law of the Lord,  
and they study it day and night.  
They are like trees that grow beside a stream,  
that bear fruit at the right time,  
and whose leaves do not dry up.

### **Reading 1 John 4 v 7 – 21**

Dear friends, let us love one another, because love comes from God. Whoever loves is a child of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. And God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world, so that we might have life through him. This is what love is: it is not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the means by which our sins are forgiven.

Dear friends, if this is how God loved us, then we should love one another. No one has ever seen God, but if we love one another, God lives in union with us, and his love is made perfect in us. We are sure that we live in union with God and that he lives in union with us, because he has given us his Spirit. And we have seen and tell others that the Father sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. If we declare that Jesus is the Son of God, we live in union with God and God lives in union with us. And we ourselves know and believe the love which God has for us. God is love, and those who live in love live in union with God and God lives in union with them. Love is made perfect in us in order that we may have courage on the Judgment Day;

We pray especially for....

You are the vine, we are the branches, help us bear the fruit of love.

God with us, we pray for this country to be filled with your love:  
Love showing respect to the individual;  
Love showing care to the needy and sick;  
Love protecting both young and old;  
Love reaching out to all.

We pray especially for our country this week, as we come to the local elections on Thursday, for good, honest and caring government.

You are the vine, we are the branches, help us bear the fruit of love.

Holy Spirit, we pray for this church to be filled with your love:  
Love binding us together;  
Love inspiring our worship and service;  
Love giving us courage and vision;  
Love reaching out to all.

We pray especially today for those members of our church family for whom we feel concern, for....

You are the vine, we are the branches, help us bear the fruit of love.

God our Saviour, we pray for our lives to be filled with your love:  
Love warming our hearts with joy;  
Love casting out sin and fear;  
Love guiding our thoughts and actions;  
Love reaching out to all.

You are the vine, we are the branches, help us bear the fruit of love.  
Amen.

### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### **Hymn StF 615 Let love be real**

- 1 Let love be real, in giving and receiving,  
without the need to manage and to own;  
a haven free from posing and pretending,  
where every weakness may be safely known.  
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,  
give me your love wherever we may go:  
as God loves us, so let us love each other,  
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.

When gardening pruning can seem harsh. Why cut off growing branches and dispose of them? I'm not very good at pruning, always anxious I will do it at the wrong time or take off the wrong bits, and surely if you want more fruit you need longer stems? But no, all the horticultural wisdom will tell you that prudent pruning will concentrate the growing power to the areas where it is needed most and will result in more and better fruit. If we are living in God and God is alive in us, then we will blossom and bear good fruit. We remain in God if we pray, if we love and care for the marginalised, if we fight for social justice, and if we proclaim the Gospel in word and deed. Through those things the fruit of the vine will be the growth of the Kingdom. Thanks be to God.

### Prayer

Lord, you are the True Vine and we are the branches.  
May we remain strong in faith, united with you,  
And so bear the fruit of your love in our lives -  
The fruit of love, joy, peace, patience and kindness,  
Of generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Amen.

### Hymn StF 394 *Spirit of God, unseen as the wind,*

*Spirit of God, unseen as the wind, gentle as is the dove,  
Teach us the truth and help us believe, show us the Saviour's love.*

- 1 You spoke to us, long, long ago, gave us the written Word;  
We read it still, needing its truth through it God's voice is heard  
*Chorus*
- 2 Without your help, we fail our Lord, we cannot live His way,  
We need Your power, we need Your strength,  
following Christ each day.

*Chorus*

*Margaret V Old (born 1932)*

### Prayers of Intercession

You are the vine, we are the branches, help us bear the fruit of love.

Parent God, we pray for the world to be filled with your love:  
Love striving for justice;  
Love banishing hunger;  
Love destroying warfare;  
Love reaching out to all.

and we will have it because our life in this world is the same as Christ's. There is no fear in love; perfect love drives out all fear. So then, love has not been made perfect in anyone who is afraid, because fear has to do with punishment. We love because God first loved us. If we say we love God, but hate others, we are liars. For we cannot love God, whom we have not seen, if we do not love others, whom we have seen. The command that Christ has given us is this: whoever loves God must love others also.

### Prayer of Confession

Holy God, you have called us to be a holy people.  
We confess with shame our pride and self-will.  
We have disobeyed your law.  
We have gone our own way and done our own thing.  
Have mercy on us and forgive us.

Loving Father,  
we confess with shame that, because of our laziness and selfishness,  
your love has failed to reach others through us.  
Sometimes, afraid for our own safety,  
we have passed by on the other side.  
Have mercy on us and forgive us.  
Help us to live as your loving and obedient children;  
for Christ's sake. Amen

The Father has sent the son to be the saviour of the world.  
Our sins are forgiven for his sake. Amen

### Hymn StF 516 **What shall I do my God to love**

- 1 What shall I do my God to love,  
My Saviour, and the world's, to praise?  
Whose tenderest compassions move  
To me and all the fallen race,  
Whose mercy is divinely free  
For all the fallen race, and me!
- 2 I long to know, and to make known,  
The heights and depths of love divine,  
The kindness thou to me hast shown,  
Whose every sin was counted thine:  
My God for me resigned his breath;  
He died to save my soul from death.

- 3 How shall I thank thee for the grace  
On me and all mankind bestowed?  
O that my every breath were praise!  
O that my heart were filled with God!  
My heart would then with love o'erflow,  
And all my life thy glory show.

*Charles Wesley (1707-1788)*

### **Reading John 15 v 1 – 8**

"I am the real vine, and my Father is the gardener. He breaks off every branch in me that does not bear fruit, and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit, so that it will be clean and bear more fruit.

You have been made clean already by the teaching I have given you.

Remain united to me, and I will remain united to you.

A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it can do so only if it remains in the vine. In the same way you cannot bear fruit unless you remain in me.

"I am the vine, and you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will bear much fruit; for you can do nothing without me. Those who do not remain in me are thrown out like a branch and dry up; such branches are gathered up and thrown into the fire, where they are burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, then you will ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it. My Father's glory is shown by your bearing much fruit; and in this way you become my disciples.

### **Address**

Have you ever been in the situation where you have had to leave something behind in the care of another person? It may be a home and garden, lovingly tended for many years and then, when the time comes, and you move on the next owners strip everything out and start again. You can feel betrayed and undervalued if your work is not appreciated. It can happen in a job; if you have built up particular ways of working and the next post holder rips up the guidelines and makes everyone do it a different way. I remember in one Circuit the Leadership team spent two years developing a new strategy for mission and ministry, only for a new Superintendent to arrive and trash it all and do it "their" way!

Jesus, in John 15, is speaking to his disciples who will continue the mission he began. He wants them to continue the work God the Father has done as the gardener and to bear even more and perhaps even better fruit in the

future. But, unlike the situations I have described above, he is not going so far away that he will not be involved in their work. Jesus is the Vine, connecting by the Spirit all who are engaged in his mission. The disciples will abide in him and he in them (v4).

The vineyard is an image deeply rooted in the Scriptures and is about the interconnectedness of God and the God's people, specifically the Jews. Jesus is looking ahead to the next phase of relationship with God, after his death, resurrection and ascension, when the responsibility of God's people will be passed to the disciples. Their success as fruit-bearers will depend upon them being firmly linked to the vine, to Jesus. Being disconnected can happen for two reasons: first by falling out and breaking the bond of love of God, or secondly by being pruned away because they have not been the fruit-bearers the need to be. In modern terms we might say some people leave the church, the body of Christ, because they cease to believe, while others leave because they don't live up to the standards of Christian life. In both cases it will enable the body to be stronger and more fruitful.

The Vine has been a useful image for us during the last year or more. Despite being separated from each other, especially when we have not been able to worship in a church building, we have still been linked to Jesus and the Christian fellowship in many different ways: phone calls, newsletters, online worship and so on. It can continue to be a helpful picture as we go into the unknown future. Some people may not come back to church, because they think they don't need it, or even don't need God. Others will need some encouragement to return, to help them overcome their understandable nervousness about being with people. The gardener has to be sensitive to which branches will benefit from pruning and which need tender care. Some church leaders are now talking about Hybrid Church, a mix of traditional worship in a building alongside the newly experienced ways such as online worship, which can be watched when it is convenient in a busy family lifestyle. It will take much wisdom and discernment to decide what to prune, what to feed and what will bear the best fruit. How the mission of the church adapts to the new situation is still to be worked out, however the ultimate aim has to be the same, to make more followers of Jesus Christ. This will be alongside our other callings to worship, to learning and caring and to Christian service. This is the fruit by which we will be judged, by God, by those outside the church, and by ourselves.