

Welcome to Morning Worship

5th Sunday of Easter

Sunday 2nd May 2021

Click on the underlined links to take you to safe content on the internet.

If you are able light a candle as you start the service and if others are in the house encourage them to read some of the service with you.

Preparation

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with you.

All and also with you.

*Alleluia! Christ is Risen
He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

Opening Prayer and Confession

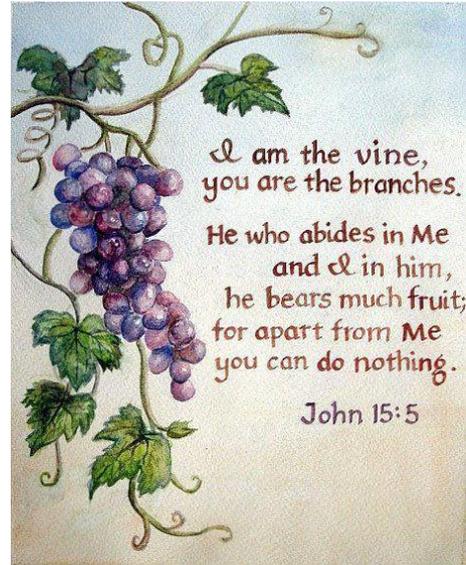
Jesus Christ, risen Master and triumphant Lord,
we come to you in sorrow for our sins,
and confess to you our weakness and unbelief.

We have lived by our own strength,
and not by the power of your resurrection.
In your mercy forgive us.
Lord, hear and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes,
as faithless and not believing.
In your mercy forgive us.
Lord, hear and help us.

We have lived for is world alone,
and doubted our home in heaven.
In your mercy forgive us.
Lord, hear and help us.

May the God of Love and Power
forgive us and free us from our sins
heal and strengthen us by His Spirit
and raise you to new life in Christ our Lord **Amen.**



Hymn [Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven](#)

The Word of God

Readings: [Acts 8: 26-40](#)
[John 15: 1-8](#)

Reflection by Rev'd Michelle Petch

Have you ever had one of those experiences when you just felt that you were in the right place at the right time. When a chance meeting or conversation was just what was needed. As though it had somehow been planned without your knowledge. I imagine if I gave you a few moments to think, you could all think of a time when that had happened to you. It's certainly happened to me. Quite a lot, in fact, and I've started to call them God- incidences instead of coincidences, because somehow it has felt that God was in it.

So maybe this is how it was for Philip in the story we heard in our first reading from Acts. He had been preaching in Samaria when an angel told him to go south on the Wilderness Road. How did the angel communicate this? Well, we don't know. But it was an angel from God, and so we can be sure God was in this. Perhaps Philip had a hunch, an inner feeling, but there was something that prompted him to go to the wilderness road.

On the road he meets a grand chariot, carrying an important official from the Ethiopian court. Again, prompted to do so, Philip gets into the chariot alongside the official and discovers the Ethiopian puzzling over the book of Isaiah. What an opportunity that is presenting itself to Philip to share the good news of Jesus!

And so, Philip uses the passage the Ethiopian is reading to explain to him how the scriptures have been fulfilled in Jesus.

It's reminiscent of the road to Emmaus, when Jesus came alongside the two disciples and showed them how the scriptures pointed to himself.

Philip is simply copying the example of his master. He opens the good news of Jesus Christ to one who is anxious to hear it – someone who is hungry for spiritual guidance – who is ready to receive new life. And it all happens so quickly!

The man is converted and asks to be baptised as they pass by some water. Philip gladly seizes the opportunity, baptises him there and then, and then is whisked away again by the Spirit.

The Ethiopian, meanwhile, continues on his way – back to court – a new man. Shining with a new faith in Christ, he is ready to share Jesus with a whole new continent. And the rest is history, for judging by the strength of the ancient Ethiopian Coptic churches in the ensuing centuries, he did a remarkably good job.

And so then we turn to the gospel reading, where Jesus says, 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower'. Before he died, Jesus left his followers a number of images of himself that they could remember and access after his death. Pictures that would help them and us continue the work of building the kingdom of God on earth. *I am the good shepherd*, which we focused on last week. *I am the light of the world*, which we focus on particularly at Christmas and Easter, and there are several others.

By the time of Jesus, the image of the vine was already the supreme symbol for the nation of Israel. Israel in the Old Testament is called God's special vine. A golden vine trailed over the entrance to the Temple in Jerusalem, and the vine was a picture on the coinage at the time. So, Jesus is saying that he is the vine – the new Israel – the one through whom all peoples and all nations will be saved. He says, 'Abide in me as I abide in you', which means be part of Jesus the vine, and know that Jesus the vine is part of you – we are all wrapped up together in this image.

Christianity is all about community; we belong to one another; we are all in it together, and have a responsibility towards each other. We are all branches on the vine, and together we make up the plant. Therefore, we need to care for one another. We need to know each other and should make every effort to work together for the good of all.

But that isn't the end of it. For the vine isn't just for us. New branches are to be grafted into the vine. This provides the link with the first reading, for this is what happened with the Ethiopian. As a eunuch, under Jewish law, he was considered unclean; he wasn't whole and therefore wasn't pure. He may have gone up to Jerusalem to pray, but he wouldn't have been allowed in the Temple. But, through baptism, through the working of the Holy Spirit within him, he has become acceptable. He's been cleansed from sin by the death of Jesus on the cross, and grafted into the vine by the word of Jesus spoken to him. He is a new branch, with new life, new responsibilities and new power. Philip is doing an excellent job at bearing fruit that God may be glorified.

And we, in our turn, are called to bear fruit for God too. Every branch that doesn't bear fruit God removes from the vine. Every branch that does bear fruit God prunes to bear more fruit. Pruning makes the vine healthier. And sometimes we need God to strip away particular habits or attitudes that we've allowed to get out of hand so that we can serve God better. That can be quite painful for us, but it is necessary.

Jesus reminds us that his words need to abide in us – to be part of us. Through Bible reading, prayer, regular worship and receiving Jesus in the bread and wine of communion, we remain in the vine.

Those whom Jesus is waiting to graft into the vine are all around us. The Holy Spirit is preparing the ground here and now in Rastrick, just as the Spirit prepared for the 'chance' meeting of Philip and the Ethiopian. We need to ensure that we are in tune with the Spirit so we can recognise and respond when prompted to share our faith. Philip's encounter was on the Wilderness Road, a barren and unpromising place. And

so we should be prepared for God to open opportunities for us in unlikely and unexpected settings. Living in step with the Spirit always brings an element of unpredictability and surprise. Be open to that!

We who gather around the Lord's table are the community of the vine; branches bearing fruit for God – growing the kingdom of God around us. It's both a gift and a task. We are called together to graft new branches into Jesus our vine and welcome new life in our midst.

Let us pray

Lord of the true vine, may I always remain firmly joined with you, rooted in the deep source of my being. May my faith flourish in the garden of your love, to bring forth good fruit to your honour and glory. Amen

Hymn [A new Commandment](#)

The Creed

Let us declare our faith in God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

**All We believe in God the Father,
God almighty, by whose plan
earth and heaven sprang to being,
all created things began.
We believe in Christ the Saviour,
Son of God in human frame,
virgin-born, the child of Mary
upon whom the Spirit came.
Christ, who on the cross forsaken,
like a lamb to slaughter led,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
he descended to the dead.
We believe in Jesus risen,
heaven's king to rule and reign,
to the Father's side ascended
till as judge he comes again.
We believe in God the Spirit;
in one Church, below, above:
saints of God in one communion,
one in holiness and love.
So by faith, our sins forgiven,
Christ our Saviour, Lord and friend,
we shall rise with him in glory
to the life that knows no end.
Amen.**

Prayers of intercession prepared by John Hearson

It's nearly Pentecost.

A time of the church's year when we read again with wonder about the birth of the church. And then we wake up to our calling to be a part of this same story, continuing Jesus' work in the power of the Holy Spirit in our own generation.

As we enjoy the story of Philip and the Eunuch, we think of the many people, both locals and strangers who, like him, are searching for truth. So many in Rastrick know nothing of You, nor do they meet a Christian. Holy Spirit, may we be prepared, like Philip, to hear your prompting to go to places we never expected. Give us, too, divine appointments to share your Good News. And deepen our understanding of our faith. May we join the disciples on their journey to discover the Risen Jesus in a way that's new and fresh, so we can share confidently.

Holy Spirit, inspire Michelle as she leads our churches into a fresh expression of life. In particular, may our Pentecost services broadcast a message to our whole community that You are alive, and that we have Good News to proclaim. May You mould our thoughts, too, on how to reach the families of our community. We pray for Woodhouse School to enjoy a happy, harmonious atmosphere and that its pupils may be blessed as they seek to learn and develop their skills. We pray for a successful restart for The Space at Field Lane, with ready take-up by volunteers and members.

Lord hear us, Lord graciously hear us.

Springtime.

Father God, most of us know about pruning. We enjoy watching our shrubs burst into life with fresh energy, ready to bear flowers and fruit later in the summer. As we emerge from Lockdown, may this, too, be a springtime for our church. May we accept and welcome the changes that come with being pruned, so we may be a body that bears fruit in this community.

We pray for those countries that today are stricken by grief, and we lament on their behalf. Israel, where what started as a joyful Jewish celebration turned into a disaster. India, a land where funeral pyres mock the earlier declaration of victory over Covid-19. South America, especially Brazil, where the common people are having to bear the consequences of wilful misgovernment. Lord God, ruler of the nations, may these disasters lead to a humbling of proud leaders, a pruning process that leads to justice for all their people. For the Palestinians in Israel. For non-Hindus and lower caste people of India. For the Amazon tribes, the poor in Brazil, and the rainforest itself.

Lord God, may Covid-19 become the wake-up call for our world. May we welcome the pruning of our consumption habits and our investment in fossil fuels, so that we act as good stewards of this wonderful planet and build Your Kingdom on earth.

Lord hear us. Lord graciously hear us.

We ask that all who are involved in our two churches' ministry may drink deeply from You this year as Pentecost approaches, so they may be filled with fresh energy by the Spirit. We honour Alan, John and Glenn, our lay readers, and also Michael, Stephen, Gill and Barbara our retired clergy. May Deaconess Anne and Bishops Jonathan and Nick know Your inspiration as they encourage and inspire the churches of our diocese. And we remember our own calling to minister to one another. Help us to build up one another in faith.

We remember those on our newsletter, particularly asking that You be at the bedside of those who are dying, preparing them to pass in peace and in confidence of Your welcome home. And be with those who grieve, that they may know that You will never fail nor forsake them.

Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

A Prayer for Church Growth

All God of Mission

**Who along brings growth to your church,
Send your Holy Spirit to give
Vision to our planning
Wisdom to our actions
And power to our witness.
Help our church to grow in numbers,
In spiritual commitment to you,
And in service to our local community,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

The Lord's Prayer is said

Gathering our prayers and praises into one,
as our Saviour taught us, so we pray

All 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.**

The Collect for the day

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. **Amen.**

Hymn [Lord, for the years](#)

The Final Prayer & Blessing

Eternal God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life:
grant us to walk in his way,
to rejoice in his truth,
and to share his risen life;
who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

The blessing of God Almighty,
Father Son and Holy Spirit
be with us and remain with us
this day and for evermore

All Amen

Go in the Peace of the risen Christ
to Love and to serve the Lord
All In the name of Christ Amen