

Sunday, 28 April 2024
The Fifth Sunday of Easter
- Morning Worship
Led by Philip Dean, LLM
<https://zoom.us/j/82311473640>



Preparation

O Lord, open our lips
and our mouth shall proclaim your praise.
In your resurrection, O Christ,
let heaven and earth rejoice. Alleluia.

Hymn – Alleluia, Alleluia! Hearts to heaven and voices raise

- 1 Alleluia, Alleluia!
hearts to heaven and voices raise;
sing to God a hymn of gladness,
sing to God a hymn of praise:
he who on the Cross a victim
for the world's salvation bled,
Jesus Christ the King of glory,
now is risen from the dead.
- 2 Christ is risen, Christ the first-fruits
of the holy harvest field,
which will all its full abundance
at his second coming yield;
then the golden ears of harvest
will their heads before him wave,
ripened by his glorious sunshine,
from the furrows of the grave.
- 3 Christ is risen, we are risen;
shed upon us heavenly grace,
rain and dew, and gleams of glory
from the brightness of thy face;

that we, with our hearts in heaven,
here on earth may fruitful be,
and by angel-hands be gathered,
and be ever, Lord, with thee.

4 Alleluia, Alleluia,
glory be to God on high;
Alleluia to the Saviour,
who has gained the victory;
Alleluia to the Spirit,
fount of love and sanctity;
Alleluia, Alleluia,
to the Triune Majesty.

Christopher Wordsworth (1807-1885)

Opening Prayer

Blessed are you, Lord God of our salvation,
to you be praise and glory for ever.

As once you ransomed your people from Egypt
and led them to freedom in the promised land,
so now you have delivered us from the dominion of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your risen Son.

May we, the first fruits of your new creation,
rejoice in this new day you have made,
and praise you for your mighty acts.

Blessed be God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Blessed be God for ever.

Lighting the Easter Candle

Christ yesterday and today,
the beginning and the end,
Alpha and Omega,
all time belongs to him,
and all ages;
to him be glory and power,
through every age and for ever. **Amen.**

May the light of Christ, rising in glory,
banish all darkness from our hearts and minds.

Confession

Christ our passover lamb has been sacrificed for us.

Let us therefore rejoice by putting away all malice and evil
and confessing our sins with a sincere and true heart.

cf I Corinthians 5.7,8

**Father eternal, giver of light and grace,
we have sinned against you and against our neighbour,
in what we have thought,
in what we have said and done,
through ignorance, through weakness,
through our own deliberate fault.**

**We have wounded your love,
and marred your image in us.**

**We are sorry and ashamed,
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 lead us out from darkness
to walk as children of light.**

Amen.

May the Father of all mercies
cleanse us from our sins,
and restore us in his image
to the praise and glory of his name,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Meditation on the Easter Anthems

I Christ our passover has been sacrificed for us: ♦
so let us celebrate the feast,

2 not with the old leaven of corruption and wickedness: ♦
but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

I Corinthians 5.7b, 8

3 Christ once raised from the dead dies no more: ♦
death has no more dominion over him.

4 In dying he died to sin once for all: ♦
in living he lives to God.

5 See yourselves therefore as dead to sin: ♦
and alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Romans 6.9-11

6 Christ has been raised from the dead: ♦
the first fruits of those who sleep.

7 For as by man came death: ♦
by man has come also the resurrection of the dead;

8 for as in Adam all die: ♦
even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

I Corinthians 15.20-22

**Glory to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning is now
and shall be for ever. Amen.**

Let us meditate on verses 1 and 2 for one minute.

The Word of God read by Clare Crang

Acts 8:26-end

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

²⁶ 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.) ²⁷ 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 ²⁸ and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it.' ³⁰ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading

the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' ³¹He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³²Now 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.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.'

³⁴The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' ³⁵Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶As 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?' ³⁸He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When 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. ⁴⁰But 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.

John 15:1-8

Jesus the True Vine

15 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide 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. ⁵I 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. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my

words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Sermon by Sue Nelms

Let us pray

Now, O Lord, take my lips and speak through them; take our minds and think through them; take our hearts and set them on fire with love for you. Amen.

At the moment the lectionary seems to be focusing on the agricultural life. Last week we had Jesus as the Good Shepherd. This week we look at Jesus as the true vine with his father God as the vine-grower. Today I am going to do something that I don't usually do in a sermon – approach the reading on a verse-by-verse basis - but I think this is the best way to approach today's reading.

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower'. Just as we often refer to Jesus as the Lamb of God, today he is the true vine and God is the gardener, the vine grower. Creator God, the one who spoke into existence all things is very much part of the very existence of Jesus, supporting him as he glorifies the name of God.

Vines are grafted onto a rootstock and apparently the grafting line should always be planted in the light. Another of the names used for Jesus is the light of the world; in order for us to learn and grow, we are rooted in Jesus and need to live in that light.

² He (the gardener) removes every branch in me that bears no fruit'. Vines need lots of attention; they shouldn't be allowed to grow too quickly and should be trimmed back regularly over the first three years. Three years rings a bell – the disciples spent three years living with Jesus, being taught and prepared by him for their ministry. The apostle Paul also spent three years reflecting and preparing for his formal ministry after his initial attempt to join the disciples in Jerusalem, when he wasn't ready for them and they weren't ready for him. Like the

vines that might not be ready to bear good fruit, Paul needed not to minister until he was ready to speak in the power of God. That is possibly also why potential ministers, both ordained and lay, have a period of discernment and training to prepare them to minister in the name of God.

‘Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.

³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.’ It might feel counter - intuitive if you don’t understand gardening but it is necessary to trim back productive branches in order for them to grow back and bear even more fruit. Cutting them back enables them to put their energy into solid, productive growth. Jesus tells the disciples that they are already experiencing this process; they are pruned back or cleansed by hearing the message that Jesus has been teaching them. We too are pruned back by the words that we hear spoken in Jesus’s name.

⁴ 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’. Jesus reminds us that this is a two-way process – he dwells in us if we dwell in him. A lone branch cannot bear fruit on its own; it needs to be joined to the main branch, part of the tree with its roots firmly set in the soil, in order to be fruitful.

⁵ 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’. The Message uses these words – ‘When you’re joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant’. These are such powerful words. The idea of an intimate, organic relationship with Jesus is so wonderful, so loving, so empowering.

⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned’. This is such a final image. If we are not with or part of Jesus, we are

worthless. We wither and perish and are then thrown into the fire and burned. This life is it; there is no more, whereas when we are part of Jesus and the greater plant, then we continue to be fruitful and alive. There really is not much that you can do with grapevine wood. It becomes dry and brittle once it has been cut out of the main trunk. This is different from pruning, whereby a branch is cut back to a growth point so that it can grow back stronger. If the branch is unproductive and therefore cut out of the trunk, it cannot survive. If it is burned, it cannot survive. Burning of unproductive branches is final while the healthy tree continues to grow and be fruitful.

⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you'. Again to quote the Message 'But if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon'. I like the pointer in this translation. It is so easy to think that anything we want will be given us if we ask God for it and to be upset if the Ferrari we have always wanted or whatever doesn't appear. That is not what the Message thinks this passage is saying. It says that if we are at home in Jesus then the things that we want will be the things that He wants too. That is what God wants to hear. That is what it means to be fruitful.

Finally ⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. Again from the Message 'This is how my Father shows who he is - when you produce grapes, when you mature as my disciples.' A really exciting message. God is glorified by fruitful vines, by us being productive in his name.

I can't help thinking that during those times when I wonder just what my purpose is, what am I doing here, I have, in this passage, a very special message, one of encouragement, one of togetherness, working together for the glory of God, one that I need to hear.

There are various passages in the Old Testament which talk about Israel being symbolised by a vine but they do not always paint it in a

positive light. Psalm 80 talks about the vine coming out of Egypt and initially growing but then being cut down and burned (Psalm 80:8-16). Isaiah chapter 5 includes what is known as the Song of the Unfruitful Vineyard (Isaiah 5.1-7). In these verses the choice vines go on to yield wild grapes (presumably bitter) rather than the grapes the gardener was hoping for. In Jeremiah (Jeremiah 2.21) the Lord is recorded lamenting 'Yet I planted you as a choice vine, from the purest stock. How then did you turn degenerate and become a wild vine?' That is so sad.

However, the vine of the New Testament is very different because, as we have heard this morning, Jesus has become the true vine, the rootstock upon which we can all be part of in order to be fruitful. May we all grow and be part of the glory of God.

Let us pray

Thank You, Father, that I am a heavenly branch that is united to my heavenly Vine, the lovely Lord Jesus Christ. May His life flow through mine as sap flows through the branch that is grafted into its parent stem. Fill me with His fullness so that I may live and move and grow and bear fruit as I abide more and more in Him. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Responsory

Death is swallowed up in victory.

Where, O death, is your sting?

Christ is risen from the dead,
the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Death is swallowed up in victory.

The trumpet will sound
and the dead shall be raised.

Where, O death, is your sting?

We shall not all sleep,
but we shall be changed.

Death is swallowed up in victory.

Where, O death, is your sting?

from I Corinthians 15

Affirmation of Faith

Let us declare our faith
in the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Christ died for our sins
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he was buried;
he was raised to life on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures;
afterwards he appeared to his followers,
and to all the apostles:
this we have received,
and this we believe. Amen.**

Cf I Corinthians 15.3-7

Prayers of Intercession offered by John Crang

“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.”

Lord Jesus, thank you for being the true vine that sustains and nourishes our spiritual lives. Help us to recognize our need to remain connected to you and to abide in your love. Strengthen our faith and enable us to bear fruit that glorifies the Father and impacts the world around us. Teach us to prioritize our relationship with you, trusting that you are the source of our spiritual growth and fruitfulness.
Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayer**

Heavenly Father, you are a Just God, fair in your dealings and impartial with your judgments. we pray for your wisdom and guidance for ourselves and all leaders throughout the world as we try to resolve conflicts that seem insurmountable. Guide our words to be gentle and assuring and not confrontational. Help us all at every level of responsibility to patiently show persistent kindness even when hostility is shown.

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

We pray for teachers, for students, and for all those in authority and leadership, both locally and throughout the world. Give them your mind, and surround them with godly counselors who will exercise integrity and work for justice, morality, and freedom. Help them to look to you and not to dismiss you.

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

We pray for the lost, the hurting, the lonely, the sick, the bereaved, and those who are imprisoned behind both visible and invisible walls. Send your comfort, your peace, and your calming presence to those who are without hope. Protect the defenceless, hold them close to your heart, and bring alongside those who can listen, care and encourage.

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

Risen Lord, the resurrection and the life, we give you thanks for all who have lived and believed in you; for those we remember this day. and for all those whom we love but see no longer, that they may have rest in that place where sorrow is no more, and saints and angels sing out with joy.

Merciful father, **accept these prayers for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen**

Based on suggestions from Prayerist & Daily Bible

Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Easter

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.**

The Lord's Prayer

Rejoicing in God's new creation,
as our Saviour taught us, so we pray

**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.

Hymn – Jesus Shall Reign

- 1 Jesus shall reign where'er the sun
Does his successive journeys run;
His kingdom spread from shore to shore,
Till moons shall wax and wane no more.

- 2 To him shall endless prayer be made,
And endless praises crown his head;
His name like sweet perfume shall rise
With every morning sacrifice;

- 3 Blessings abound where'er he reigns;
All prisoners leap and loose their chains;
The weary find eternal rest,
And all who suffer want are blest.

4 Let every creature rise and bring
Blessing and honour to our King;
Angels descend with songs again,
And earth repeat the loud amen.

Isaac Watts (1674-1748) (One Licence 1005660)

Notices

Conclusion

God the Father,
by whose love Christ was raised from the dead,
open to you who believe the gates of everlasting life.
Amen.

God the Son,
who in bursting from the grave has won a glorious victory,
give you joy as you share the Easter faith.
Amen.

God the Holy Spirit,
who filled the disciples with the life of the risen Lord,
empower you and fill you with Christ's peace.
Amen.

And the blessing of God Almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
be amongst us, and remain with us always.
Amen.

With the power that raised Jesus from the dead at work within you,
go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia, alleluia.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia, alleluia.