



Sunday 2nd May 2021

compiled by Vicki Brown Circuit Lay Assistant

Opening words:

Draw near to God in faith – for He is with you wherever you are
Receive His peace – it is His gift of grace
Worship in love – eternal love enfolds you

Hymn: Be still (StheF 20 / MP 50)

1 Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the holy One, is here;
come bow before him now
with reverence and fear:
in him no sin is found -
We stand on holy ground.
Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One, is here.

2 Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around;
he burns with holy fire,
with splendour he is crowned:
how awesome is the sight
our radiant King of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord
is shining all around.

3 Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place;
he comes to cleanse and heal,
to minister his grace:
no work too hard for him -
in faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord
is moving in this place.

David J Evans (b.1957)

Let us pray together:

Gracious God,
source of life and growth,
may we grow into your presence
turning to you as a young plant turns to the sun.
Receiving nourishment and strength from the waters of life
may we be rooted and grounded in you,
that we may blossom and be fruitful to your glory,
in Jesus name. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer

Reading: John 15 v 1-8

“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.

Prayer:

Gardening God,
Tending the ground and all that grows,
Making space for the roots and branches to reach out
That fruit will flourish
Remind us of our growth in you.

Gardening God,
Pruning and gathering and burning
Making space for new fruit,
Cutting back dead wood,
Remind us of our growth in you.

Gardening God,
Without you we cannot live,
Because of you, our life and love is true.

We remain in you,
And by your Spirit we bear your fruit,
Then the world will know the glory of your truth.

Anne Sardeson (URC Prayer Handbook 2018)

Song: I love you, Lord (MP 287)

I Love You Lord
and I lift my voice
to worship You,
O my soul rejoice!
Take joy, my King,
in what You hear,
may it be a sweet,
sweet sound in Your ear.

Laurie Klein

Reading: 1 John 4 v 7-21

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Reflection

The vine is used as a spiritual metaphor many times, going way back into the Old Testament. The vine is seen as symbolic of the nation in Isaiah 5 with God as the gardener. In John's gospel Jesus proclaims that he is the true vine, no longer are God's people restricted to those of a particular nationhood or bloodline – it is all about being grafted into the true vine.

The metaphor is a strong one, the branches are fed by the root, supported by the stem. The fruit comes as a direct result of the strength of the plant. A branch cannot produce fruit independently, it flourishes because it is part of the whole.

John returns to this theme of abiding in Christ in his letter. I encourage you to return to the reading at the end of today's worship. Online, you can just pause and rewind. Imagine that you are hearing these words for the first time. Be slow and prayerful as you read it, or tap the pause button after each sentence and think about the power of what John is saying. He is not using metaphor, it's as blunt and plain as could be.

So what can be said to expound this passage, bring out more meaning and help folk to understand it better? I don't think there's anything. This is the reflection where I spend five minutes telling you that I am not going to say anything!

Think about your experience of God, the Church as a body and individual relationships. How we form opinions and judgements on issues – and people; do we think and behave as people grafted into the vine? How would you describe your understanding of Christianity? Robert Fruehwirth, the former director of the Julian Centre in Norwich said "Christianity is the intervention of God's love." It can take a lifetime of unpicking and applying that sentence, wrestling with questions and growing deeper in faith. Simple and yet cosmically profound.

John challenges us as he challenged his first readers how to live and why.

Let us pray together:

Compassionate God,
as we pray, we remember that we live in you and you live in us.
Bring to our minds those people and situations that you are calling us to hold in prayer today.

We pray for those who are victims of violence, whose lives have been damaged by hatred.
Pour out your healing love, Lord.

We pray for those who feel utterly alone, through family breakdown or bereavement.
Pour out your healing love, Lord.

We pray for those who are struggling with infirmity, physically and mentally.
Pour out your healing love, Lord.

We pray for your Church, where fractured relationships, misunderstandings and differing opinions cause pain.
Pour out your healing love, Lord.

Hold those for whom we pray in your perfect love,
and hold us, pouring your love into our lives that we may bring your love to others.
In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

Hymn: God is love (Singing the Faith 103)

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 heavens 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)

Blessing

God, the Father who loved us into being
God, the Son who gave himself for us
God, the Holy Spirit who breathes love into our hearts
Bless us and guide us to be a blessing to others. Amen

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Reflections on a Methodist Way of Life – Learning and Caring

The vine gets pruned – have you found spiritual benefits from things being “pruned” out of your life?
“Perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.” – What does this verse mean to you?