

Sheffield United Reformed Churches
Team Ministry worship for individuals or a family
Sunday 2nd May 2021 at 10:30 am.

Call to worship

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,
Since as Members of one body you were called to peace.
And be thankful - come and worship Him

Opening Hymn R&S 489

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart - Naught be all else to me, save that thou art
Thou my best thought by day or by night. Waking or sleeping Thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, Thou my true word. I ever with thee. Thou with me, Lord
Thou my great Father and I Thy true child. Thou in me dwelling in tenderness, mild.

Be thou my battle-shield, sword for the fight. Be thou my dignity, Thou my delight
Thou my soul's shelter, Thou my high tower. Raise thou me heavenward, O power of my power.

Riches I need not, nor man's empty praise; Thou mine inheritance, now and always
Thou and thou only the first in my heart. High King of Heaven my treasure Thou art!

Prayers of Approach, Confession and Thanksgiving

God of love, we come to you this morning just as we are
Full of thoughts and worries
Full of insecurities and hopes
Full of joy and sorrow.

Tender God, open our hearts and minds
In the stillness of this time and place and let us remember that
You abide in us, that we may abide in you and live in your love.

Risen God,
With thanksgiving we celebrate the growth and hope we witness in our lives and world
The blossoming of our trees
The nest-building of our birds
The pollinating of our bees.
Let us lift our voices and act in praise of Your beautiful creation.

Vine grower God, we are your branches
Tangled up with each other
Tangled up with our neighbours
Tangled up with our world.
Empower each of us to share Your love in all we think and do and say and transform our world.

Merciful God, we recognise that there are times
when we have acted or spoken in ways which cause pain.
So, we bring our own hurt and we bring the hurt we have caused others asking for forgiveness.

Listen to the words of Jesus, words that we can trust: "Yours sins are forgiven."

And may we be open
That our lives and our world may be created into your kingdom of peace and justice.
In the name of Jesus we pray.
Amen

We say The Lord's Prayer

Readings



Psalm 22, vv 25-31 - The ends of the earth will turn to the Lord...

John 15, vv 1-8 - Jesus is the Vine and we are the branches, bearing fruit...

1 John 4, vv 7-21 - Let's love one another, for Love comes from God...

Acts 8, vv 26-40 - The Apostle Philip shares Good News with an Ethiopian Official.

Reflection

As Synod Treasurer, I recently had to help a small local Church sort out some financial affairs. This was made so much more difficult by the fact that their bank decided to close the local branch, permanently. Contacting the bank became an almost impossible and incredibly frustrating task; hanging on the end of the telephone for, what seemed hours, pressing button one, button two, listening to a tinny version of Vivaldi's Four Seasons - which might have made the whole experience tolerable if it had not been interrupted constantly by a mechanical voice reassuring us that our call was important to them! Our isolation in lockdown has highlighted that it's important to have things close at hand and easily accessible, whether hope, zoom worship, people who care or Bank branches.

The Church of Jesus is a unique phenomenon in the world today. No other organisation has such a global reach, in every nation and in almost every village, town or city, a member of Jesus' community will be in touching distance. Jesus likens us, literally, to the branches of his life-giving Holy Spirit. He has branches on every high street!

And it is a growing community. Every day, new Members are being added to the Body of Christ. New branches are being grafted into the Vine. In fact, in the Biblical story we see Israel described as a Vine, sometimes wild, wayward and unfruitful but lovingly tended by the Lord. And at the heart of that story we see the Father's great purpose, to graft new life continually into the Vine as the Gentiles (non-Israelites) are called to turn to God for salvation (see Romans 11, v11 ff).

The Psalmist highlights this great vision when they declare that "All the Ends of the Earth will turn to the Lord...all the families of the Nations...future generations will be told about the Lord and proclaim His righteousness to peoples as yet unborn (Psalm 22, vv 27, 30, 31). In the Book of Acts we see this being worked out in practice as the Apostles, led by the Holy Spirit, share Christ with people from far-flung places. Philip leads a royal Ethiopian Official to Jesus and so lays the foundation for one of the world's oldest national churches (Acts 8, vv 26-40).

In John's Gospel, Jesus says that we, as the branches of the Vine will bring much glory to God as we demonstrate to the world that we are the disciples of Jesus in a way that enables others to join us in our journey of faith (John 15, v8). And the world needs to hear the message of the Gospel, desperately. So how will we be effective in this great calling?

Firstly, we are taught to "abide, or remain in the vine" (John 15, vv 4, 5 etc). As a vine branch draws its life from the stem so we draw our wisdom, our direction and our strength from the one with whom we are in relationship. Elsewhere in John's Gospel, Jesus is clear that He is unable to do anything without a close communion with His Father that enables him to perceive all that the Father wants to do and emulate Him in His strength (cf John 5, v19ff). Here we have one of the great "I AM" sayings of John's Gospel. In saying that he is the True Vine, Jesus is leaving no room for doubt that he is the living source of wisdom and power for us as his disciples. This demands a willingness to listen prayerfully and make ourselves available obediently for God to use us. For many of us our spirituality is at a level of "God is there when I need Him". For a true disciple, abiding in the life of Christ it needs to be "I am there when God needs me"

Secondly, we are warned that those who are serious about discipleship will be “pruned” just as a vine is cut back so that it bears even more fruit (John 15, vv1-2). Those who bear no fruit are fit only for the fire but even those who bear fruit will experience the challenge and pain of pruning. Perhaps Lockdown has been one great season of pruning for the Church? Will we emerge leaner but more effective? Or we could be like the plant that shuns the change implicit in pruning and returns...to fruitlessness. We must embrace the cross that Jesus bids us take up, whether it is repentance from a sinful habit or attitude, letting go of comfortable circumstances and things, changing our priorities or undergoing character building through loss and suffering. The Father, who is the vine-dresser is gentle - perhaps His compassion is seen in the very fact that our struggles can serve a higher purpose, to be Christ-Like - but He is also serious about those purposes. Even a really nice, gentle man like Monty Don on *Gardener’s World* recommends pruning when appropriate!

Finally, as the first two points imply, everything is aimed at making the branches fruitful. How will the branches of the Vine bring glory to God and show the world that we are true disciples of Christ? By bearing much fruit (John 15 v8). A tree or vine that draws its life from a corrupt source will bear bad fruit (see Matthew 7 vv17f). Many of the things in which we seek satisfaction, whether money or power, achievement or pleasure, do not produce this kind of character; sometimes the very opposite or at the least a nagging dissatisfaction. But a branch joined to the True Vine will bear the likeness of Christ, in the “fruits” of the Holy Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5, 22-23). These are the qualities that will impress and impact the world much more than the most eloquent words, polished events or most up-to-date technology. So John, in his epistle exhorts us to live in the love of God, in obedience to Jesus’ command for all who live in God, live in love and God’s life is seen in them (I John 4, v16).

Song of response - R&S 572

Colours of the day dawn into the mind, the sun has come up, the night is behind
Go down in the city, into the street and let’s give the message to the people we meet

*So light up the fire and let the flame burn, open the door, let Jesus return
Take seeds of his Spirit, let the fruit grow. Tell the people of Jesus, let his love show*

Go through the park, on into the town. The sun still shines on; it never goes down
The light of the world is risen again. The people of darkness are needing a friend

So light up the fire...

Open your eyes, look into the sky; the darkness has come, the Son came to die.
The evening draws on; the sun disappears. But Jesus is living; His spirit is near

So light up the fire...

Prayers for the World

Vine grower God, we bring to you the prayers for our world.

Creator God, in this time of climate crisis, we recognise that sea levels are rising, whole species are going extinct and homes and livelihoods are being destroyed. Empower us to rediscover Your love of creation and to reflect that in our own lives. We pray that You can guide us to be co-creators of this new world.

Just God, in this time of pandemic, we witness that India is running out of Covid-19 vaccines as they face a devastating second wave of infections. We pray that You can guide us in ensuring vaccine production and distribution allow for lives to be saved.

God of abundant life, in this time of Black Lives Matter, we acknowledge that all races have a part to play. Empower us to build a world of justice, where power and privilege is shared. We pray that You can us guide us in committing ourselves to Your vision of the world.

Sustainer God, in this time of conflict, we are aware of violence. We lift up to you conflicts in Israel/Palestine and in Syria; in Eastern Ukraine and Yemen; in Myanmar and in homes. We pray that You can guide us in creating relationships of wholeness.

Loving God, we pray for Les. Hold him in your arms and bless him. Shine your light on the path before him and let him always feel your loving presence as he travels along the paths of life.

Risen God, who is with us always and everywhere. May we remember that every small change each of us makes has its own effect, and that together all our efforts can produce the change we seek. Help us to recognise the possibilities and challenges offered by the present moment and embrace them with faith, hope and love. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Our Closing Hymn

I the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin, My hand will save
I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright
Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

*Here I am Lord. Is it I Lord? I have heard You calling in the night
I will go Lord if you lead me; I will hold Your people in my heart*

I the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my people's pain
I have wept for love of them. They turn away...
I will break their hearts of stone; give them hearts for love alone
I will speak my word to them. Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord...

I the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the poor and lame
I will set a feast for them; My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide, 'til their hearts be satisfied
I will give My life to them. Whom shall I send?

Here I am Lord...

Blessing

Abide in the Vine, which is Christ
Endure the pruning of the Gardener, which is the Father
Go and bear fruit, by the Spirit

The blessing of the Holy Trinity
The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ
And the love of God
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
Be with you all, always - Amen