

# **Christ Church, Ipswich**

**Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021**

**Fifth Sunday of Easter**

*with Neil*

Hello, I hope all is well with you and your loved ones. Today, there is an opportunity for us all to share Holy Communion together again. If you'd like to participate, may I encourage you to prepare some bread and wine (or something as similar as possible) ready for this part of our worship. Our readings for our worship service on this Fifth Sunday of Easter are 1 John 4:7-21 which declares 'God is love' and John 15:1-8 which speaks of Jesus as being the 'true vine'.

Let us worship God together:

## **Call to worship**

Come apart from your busyness.  
Leave your stresses at the door.  
Come and reconnect with God.  
Remain in him and grow.  
Grow closer, grow deeper.  
Grow and be fruitful.  
Come and glorify God!

## **A gathering prayer**

We gather here, O Lord, for you, the vine, to nourish us.  
May we, the branches, draw our strength from you,  
and grow in harmony, unity and love.  
May we find nourishment through our rootedness  
in the life, teachings and love of Christ.  
Receive the fruits of our worship and be glorified. **Amen**

## **A prayer of approach**

Eternal God,  
we come as one and we come together,  
to draw from the source of your life-giving love,  
to reconnect with one another and with you,  
to listen to your word,  
to meet you in prayer and praise,  
and to learn and grow as your faithful disciples –  
in Jesus' name. **Amen**

## **R&S 243 Now the green blade rises**

Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,  
wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;  
Love lives again, that with the dead has been:  
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

In the grave they laid him, Love whom we had slain,  
thinking that he never would awake again,  
laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen:  
Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

Forth he came at Easter, like the risen grain,  
 he that for the three days in the grave had lain,  
 quick from the dead my risen Lord is seen:  
 Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,  
 then your touch can call us back to life again,  
 fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been:  
 Love is come again, like wheat that springs up green.

J. M. C. Crum (1872-1958) altd.\*  
 © Oxford University Press from the *Oxford Book of Carols*.

### **A prayer of adoration**

True God, true vine,  
 strength of all our being,  
 giver of all good gifts,  
 healer of all that is broken:  
 we worship you;  
 we glorify you;  
 we rejoice in you,  
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
**Amen.**

### **A prayer of confession**

Gracious God,  
 we come to you aware of our failings and conscious that we have tried to live in our own strength.  
**Forgive us and reconnect us to your vine.**  
 We have resisted the challenge of change and not trusted your truth.  
**Forgive us and reconnect us to your vine.**  
 We have rooted ourselves in our wills and not in your word.  
**Forgive us and reconnect us to your vine.**  
 We have looked for quick fixes and not kingdom-shaped growth.  
**Forgive us and reconnect us to your vine.**  
 We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Saviour.  
**Amen.**

### **Assurance of forgiveness**

Lord, we thank you that  
 when our faith becomes straggly, you prune it with your wisdom;  
 when it becomes malnourished, you nurture it with your grace;  
 when it becomes brittle, you strengthen it with your truth;  
 when it becomes barren, you restore it with your life-giving energy, forgiveness and love.  
**Amen.**

### **A prayer of praise**

Creator God,  
 in you we are all we need to be;  
 through you we grow into all that we long to be;  
 with you we bear fruits that can be used and shared and multiplied;  
 because of you our lives are rich and blessed and fruitful:  
 so we praise you in song and silence, today and every day.  
**Amen.**

## Epistle Reading 1 John 4:7-21 (NRSV)

### *God is Love*

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup> God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

<sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. <sup>15</sup> God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. <sup>16</sup> So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. <sup>17</sup> Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup> The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

## Gospel Reading John 15:1-8 (NRSV)

### *Jesus the True Vine*

<sup>1</sup> 'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. <sup>2</sup> He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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. <sup>6</sup> Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

## Reflection

Today, we read the seventh and last of the 'I am' sayings of Jesus in John's Gospel. In this parable, Jesus says that he is '*the true vine*'. Vines were valuable plants in ancient Israel; we could read of how God's peace came about when everyone sat under their own vine (Micah 4:4, Zechariah 3:10). Here, the vine is a symbol of prosperity and of a life settled enough to plant for the long term. Also, wine was prized as a gift of God (Psalm 104:15). We also find that sometimes Israel is described as God's vine (Jeremiah 2:21) in a metaphor that reflects the special relationship between God and Israel. Jesus' parable of the true vine draws on Isaiah's song of the vineyard (Isaiah 5:1ff), where God's planting symbolises '*the house of Israel and the people of Judah*'.

In John's narrative, Jesus speaks these words as part of his farewell speech delivered before his death, but just like everything else Jesus says within the farewell discourse (John 13–17), he is mindful of his later followers. John's first audience would have heard Jesus' teaching as the words of the crucified and risen Jesus speaking to them in their particular and demanding situation, where the relationship between the local synagogue and the community of Jesus followers was fractured, and even hostile (John 16:1-2, 9:22, 15:18ff). No doubt words such as '*I am the true vine*' could have offered a powerful message of hope as they walked through this tough time. They are reminded that although they may be '*hated*' (15:18, 16:2) and perhaps subjected to great hostility, they are still God's true planting, they are still living

under the gracious, loving care of God and he will nurture them, sustain them and tend to their needs as a loving '*vine-grower*'. No doubt, given the difficulties they were facing, such a message was especially apt and very well received.

We read of Jesus saying, '*abide in me*' (15:4-7). To the struggling followers of Jesus who first read these words and to ourselves now as modern day Jesus followers, this is a poignant reminder that Jesus is the source of the Christian community's identity and fruitfulness. As Scholar Gail R O'Day writes, "'Abide' or 'remain' expresses the central theme within John 15: the relationship of God and Jesus with one another and with the community is one of presence and mutuality. The vine imagery symbolizes how the life of the Christian community is shaped by love and intertwined with the abiding presence of God and Jesus.'

Of course, this language of 'abiding' has been a recurring theme throughout John's Gospel. We see it first in John 1:32, where it refers to the Spirit 'remaining' on Jesus from his baptism onwards. We find it used when two of John the Baptist's more inquisitive disciples 'remain' with Jesus for the day (John 1:39). So in the light of all this, 'abiding' speaks to us of grace and relationship, of what one writer describes as 'a flow of the 'greater love' of the new commandment (John 13:34, 15:12-13) – sustaining disciples in adversity, like fruitful branches on the vine. If the vine suffers loss because branches are pruned and then burned, this too lies within the vine-grower's remit to sustain its fruitfulness.'

Certainly, Jesus' words '*abide in me*' still speak directly to disciples like us today, as we walk through our own set of difficult conditions and they remind us of the precious gift of belonging to Christ, of being greatly loved by God and always abiding in his presence. We cherish this gift and seek to nurture our relationship with God even as we ourselves are once again reminded that we are loved, cherished by God and will always be nurtured and sustained in his tender care. In such a privileged position, how can we not grow in grace, bearing much fruit that serves not only our own church community, but most importantly, also serves the wider world with a Christ-like love which can absorb and even redeem hostility. **Amen.**

#### **R&S 442 Bread of heaven! on thee we feed**

Bread of heaven! on thee we feed,  
for thy flesh is meat indeed;  
ever may our souls be fed  
with this true and living bread!  
day by day with strength supplied,  
through the life of him who died.

Vine of heaven! thy blood supplies  
this blest cup of sacrifice;  
'tis thy wounds our healing give;  
to thy cross we look and live:  
Jesus, may we ever be  
rooted, grafted, built in thee.

Josiah Conder (1789-1855) altd.

## **Holy Communion**

### ***Words of Invitation***

Look, here is the Lord's Table spread as for a feast.  
Bread for breaking, wine poured for drinking:  
signs of his love and hospitality,  
symbols of his life broken, his blood poured out.

He is not dead!  
He is risen and present among us,  
evidence of God's covenant grace and promise.

So we come in faith to the table, you and I,  
companions on the journey.  
Some of us fresh and eager,  
others weary, in need of nourishment.  
All of us conscious of our failings.

*Almighty God,  
to whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from whom no secrets are hidden:  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your holy name;  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Come now, don't hesitate,  
the feast is ready  
and the Lord himself invites you.

### ***We Remember***

It was the night of the Passover, and Jesus and his friends were sharing supper together.  
While they were eating, he told them that one of them would betray him.  
They were appalled and protested saying 'Not I Lord, I would never betray you.'  
Jesus took some bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them saying  
'Take this and eat. This is my body.'  
He took the cup of wine and after giving thanks passed it among them saying as they drank  
'this is my blood of the covenant. It is poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. I will  
not drink again until the day comes when I drink with you in my father's Kingdom.'

### ***Prayer of Thanksgiving***

Creating and redeeming God,  
we give you thanks and praise  
for your covenant of grace:  
a covenant expressed in sinful people  
who know forgiveness,  
the weary who are refreshed,  
the hungry who are nourished,  
the captives who are set free  
and the oppressed who experience liberation.  
Thank you that you chose to make us a part of your story.

Thank you for Jesus Christ who revealed your love in his death and resurrection  
and who continues to share his life with us through bread and wine.  
Thank you for sending the Holy Spirit  
who sustains us in our walk together,  
helping us to watch over each other,  
to pray for one another,  
and to work together for justice and truth.

As we eat this bread  
and drink from the cup,  
(signs of hospitality and grace),  
may we be empowered to serve boldly  
wherever you may call.

Accept these prayers  
and our heartfelt thanksgiving  
in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

### ***We Share***

#### ***The bread***

One people, one loaf, a sign of our common faith  
and testimony to the generosity of our lord Jesus Christ.

Take this bread, food for faith,  
and feed on it with thanksgiving.

#### ***The wine***

One people, one cup, a sign of the new covenant  
poured out for you and for many.

It is a covenant sealed by his blood.  
When we drink we must be thankful  
and agree together never to forget.

### ***We Journey***

Holy God,  
we have been nourished and had our thirst quenched,  
through bread broken and wine poured  
in thanksgiving for your son Jesus Christ.  
Send us out to be as generous to those we meet this week,  
that we might show through word and deed  
that he is not dead, but risen and present among us.  
Hallelujah! **Amen.**

### **Our prayers of intercession**

God of comfort,  
as India faces the ravages of coronavirus we pray for some relief for their suffering. May those in this  
world who have an excess of medicine and oxygen be moved to generosity and may those who face great  
anguish find some measure of comfort. Even as our situation with the virus changes here we are mindful  
of the many families across this country who are still trying to come to terms with the death of a loved  
one. We pray for everyone struggling with the pain of loss. Bring solace to them, bring people who can  
offer words and actions that sooth, and help all those who grieve to find small shoots of hope for the  
future.

God of comfort,  
**listen to our prayer.**

God of justice,  
 it is with dismay that we read that Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe faces a further year in imprisonment. Thank you for those who are working for justice and trying to gain her freedom, please give them energy and focus as they try to deal with the next phase of this complex case. We pray also for Nazanin's family, her husband Richard and daughter Gabriella. It's very difficult to imagine what they are experiencing but we ask for your mercy, peace and love to surround and support them.  
 God of justice,  
**listen to our prayer.**

God of truth,  
 the recent tension in parliament and the complications around truth and honesty can be difficult for us to process. We pray for a spirit of openness and fairness for those elected to govern us. Renew their vision for their role in society and bring people into the centre of government who have a spirit of service and integrity. Help those who make decisions to see the true plight of the poorest and most disadvantaged in our society and look for that which will bring about deep and lasting change.  
 God of truth,  
**listen to our prayer.**

God of community,  
 we acknowledge the wide variety of feelings within our local communities prompted by the change to the lock down. From those who are exhilarated by trips to the hairdressers or the pub, to some who remain anxious about the possibility of a new surge, may we find understanding and empathy for one another. Give us all the ability to think in terms of the whole community not just about ourselves and help us to keep our eyes wide open to truly see how those around us are coping as things change.  
 God of community,  
**listen to our prayer.**

God of hope,  
 as the spring days bring new hopefulness may we not forget those for whom this past year has been particularly devastating. Thank you for the work the church has undertaken in order to feed, comfort and intercede for those in need, but give us the patience and endurance needed to continue the work. Prevent us from becoming fatigued or bored by the endless cycle of need we have to respond to, rather reenergise us. Inspire and envision us for new ways we can bring the kingdom of heaven to earth and hope to the people in it.  
 God of hope,  
**listen to our prayer.**

God of compassion,  
 with the summer term in motion and children enjoying being back in school we are particularly mindful of those in year 11 and year 13. Many are facing multiple tests and assessments unsure about what results will form their final grades. As they struggle to revise, fill the gaps they have missed, and reconcile their damaged school experience may they be confident they will get the grades they deserve. Bring calmness to this final part of the school year and some sense of closure as many of them transition to new stages of life and learning.

We are equally conscious of the university students continuing to learn remotely until May. Please guard their mental health. Guard them against disappointment and despair and help the institutions they are part of to find meaningful ways for them to connect with one another and engage with the subjects they are studying.  
 God of compassion,  
**listen to our prayer.**

God of love,  
thank you that we are all connected to you our true vine. When we feel disconnected from our communities, families or even ourselves help us to picture this image of the vine and feel rooted in you and your comfort, justice, truth, community, hope and compassion.

We pray for those within our own community who are in any kind of need at the moment. We are very saddened to hear of the death of Roger Fern and we pray for his family in this time of loss. We think of those who have recently received medical care and for those waiting for treatment. We pray for Netty as she recovers from her cataract surgery, for Phyllis Davies, currently in residential care, and for Joan, Chikondi and all those among us with health concerns.

*A moment of quiet for your own prayers*

God of love,  
**listen to our prayer. Amen.**

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

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. **Amen.**

### **A sending out prayer**

As we leave this place,  
may we abide with God,  
grafted and rooted and pruned.  
Lord, help us to stay connected to one another and to you,  
bearing fruit wherever your love takes us. **Amen.**

### **The Blessing**

Go and as you go, know this:  
In grace you were created,  
in mercy you have been sustained  
and in love you will be held forever.

And the blessing of almighty God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be upon you and all those you love,  
this day and always. **Amen.**

### **The Grace**

Holding one another in our thoughts, we say together:  
**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,  
be with us all, for evermore. Amen.**

With love and best wishes,  
*Neil*