

Sunday 2nd May 2021 – Vocations Sunday

This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use this coming Sunday. I invite you to share in a few moments with God at 10.30 this Sunday, knowing that other people within Paulton, Trinity and Chew Stoke Methodist Churches are sharing this act of worship with you.

Revd Martin



Psalm 22:27-31

²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

²⁸ For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

²⁹ To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

³⁰ Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord,

³¹ and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

Hymn StF 443 – Come, let us sing of a wonderful love

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XCSx7ZZ3-2I>

1 Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true ;
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you :
wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

2 Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell,
joyfully came ;
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame ;
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

3 Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet ;
why do they roam ?
Love only waits to forgive and forget ;
home, weary wanderer, home !
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

4 Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love,
come and abide,
lifting my life, till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride ;
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Robert Walmsley (1831–1905)

Prayer

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.

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 been distracted by trivialities, and have not looked for 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.

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.

Readings

Acts 8:26-40 - 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?' 31 He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. 32 Now 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?

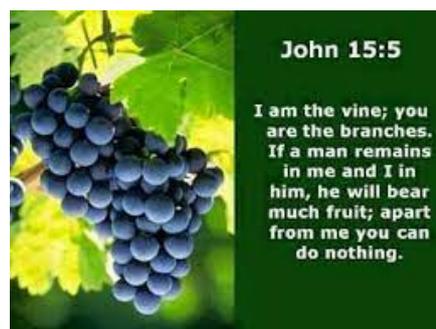
For his life is taken away from the earth.'

34 The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' 35 Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. 36 As 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?' 38 He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. 39 When 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. 40 But 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. 2 He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. 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. 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. 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. 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. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.



Hymn – I am the vine and you are the branches

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHr7Z7S3GE>

I am the vine
And you are the branches
Live in me
And you will never die.
I am the vine
And my father is the keeper
Come to me
Let the Spirit bring you life.

Like a tree planted by the living waters
To stretch its roots into the living stream
You will show no distress
In the heat of the drought
But still bear fruits and leaves

I am the vine

Come to me all you heavy laden
My yoke is easy, my burden is light.
I will raise you up on the wings of an eagle.
And through God's mountain will fly.

I am the vine

Come to me
Let the spirit bring you life.

John Michael Talbot

Reflection

Today is Vocations Sunday, when we, as preachers, are encouraged to think about our calling. Had we been in church this Sunday (not many more to go now!) we would have traditionally used this service to challenge members of the congregation who believe they are being called to be a Worship Leader or Local Preacher, and we can still do this. If anyone believes they are being called in this way, please do speak to me.

A vocation is different to a job. A job is paid employment, when we perform a given task within certain hours, and are paid accordingly. A vocation is a calling to work in all sorts of ways, which touches the very root of who we are, and challenges us to serve others, not for the money or the status, but for the satisfaction it gives us.

If asked, who would you say had a vocation? Perhaps the list would include clergy, nurses, doctors, charity workers, childminders, teachers. As Christians, we all have a vocation to serve God - to love each other, and to spread the gospel message. Some of us have formal roles within the church to do this, but we all share in this vocation, both officially and unofficially. The closing words of Matthew's gospel contain Jesus' commission to his disciples, and to us, to "make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28: 19-20). That is our Christian vocation.

At the Circuit Preachers meeting this week, we were reflecting upon notes from the Methodist Conference of 1820. Following a marked decline in membership of the Methodist Church at this time, the preachers vowed to "eliminate any distraction from the work of saving souls and spiritually shepherding the flock". The Conference approach was that "other business was subjugated to the concern of charting a more fruitful course". As a Minister, particularly during lockdown, I find myself often weighed down with administration, selling buildings, reading risk assessments, completing safeguarding training, and agreeing GDPR schedules. All of this is important and has to be done, but it doesn't feel very "fruitful". The chances to really minister to people in the way I

believe I am called to, come like a breath of fresh air, and revive my flagging soul. But this should be the majority of my working day, not the minority. This is my vocation, not processing paperwork.

In our gospel reading, John reminds us that our vocation as disciples of Christ is to "bear much fruit". This is our one and only task, and it is a task for us all as disciples. We cannot sit back and expect someone else to do it for us, it is laid upon each of our hearts. The challenge is not to despair about the things we can't do, but to find the things that we can.

Philip recognised in a passing stranger, the Ethiopian eunuch, a desire to know more of God, and so he simply sat alongside him, travelled with him. And as they travelled, they talked, and he shared his experiences of God in his life, and shared his understanding of the scripture, which the eunuch was having trouble understanding. And in simply sitting alongside Philip, the eunuch came to know God. This didn't happen in a church on Sunday morning, but in the daily lives that these two men were living. Philip saw an opportunity to share the word of God, and was so enthusiastic about it that he joined the eunuch, and their conversation bore much fruit.

In church meetings how often do we talk about, and get enthusiastic about our mission? So often we get bogged down with the state of the toilets, or who has moved what without permission, or what colour the tea towels should be, or who is decorating the Christmas tree this year. Like the Methodists of 1820, we need to eliminate these distractions. If we could all channel the passion we have for the unimportant details into our greater mission to save souls, how much more fruit might we be able to bear? In the 80 years following the 1820 conference the number of Methodists tripled in England. Could it also be so 200 years later?

So what is your vocation? It might not involve wearing a piece of white plastic around your neck, but it could involve sitting next to someone and having a conversation. As branches abiding in the vine, may we all be fruitful, and bear fruit that will last.

Amen

Prayers for others

Loving God, we pray today for all those who travel through life in a state of confusion and lack of understanding, and for those who seek to bring understanding to them.

Our thoughts today are with the ever-worsening Covid crisis in India. We pray for bereaved families, for healthcare staff unable to help, and for Governments and leaders, that compassion might help them to overcome the mountain before them.

We pray for people and businesses looking forward to the relaxation of restrictions, and we pray for wisdom and consciousness of the needs of others for whom this is a time of anxiety and fear.

We pray for the North East Somerset & Bath Circuit, of which we are a part, for it's ministers, lay workers, churches and congregations – especially this week we join with the Circuit as we pray together for Paulton and their minister, Martin.

As part of Churches Together in Radstock & Westfield we pray for our brothers and sisters at St Peters in Westfield. and for their vicar, Ian.

We pray for our families and friends, and for all those in need at this present time:-

Ann Dryden, Hazel & John Bowell, Allan & Angela Willcocks; and the family of Cyril Boucher: Frances Aldridge as she moves to her new home

And we pray for ourselves ...

Lord, may we be comforted and inspired by your presence in our lives, and may we serve you, and be fruitful in all that we do in your name.

Amen

The Lord's Prayer

We say together the prayer that Jesus gave us:

**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.
Save us from the time of
trial
and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the
power and the glory
are yours,
now and for ever. Amen.**

Hymn – StF 410 – Lord, your church on earth is seeking

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GnYUfhtz11Q>

- 1 Lord, your Church on earth is seeking your renewal from above ; teach us all the art of speaking with the accent of your love. We would heed your great commission : sending us to every place — preach, baptise, fulfil my mission, serve with love and share my grace.
- 2 Freedom give to those in bondage, lift the burdens caused by sin. Give new hope, new strength and courage, grant release from fears within : light for darkness ; joy for sorrow ; love for hatred ; peace for strife. These and countless blessings follow as the Spirit gives new life.
- 3 In the streets of every city where the bruised and lonely dwell, let us show the Saviour's pity, let us of his mercy tell. In all lands and with all races let us serve, and seek to bring all the world to render praises, Christ, to you, Redeemer, King.

Hugh Sherlock (1905–1998)

Blessing

As we leave this time of worship, 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.

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

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