

## Call to Worship

Alleluia! Christ is Risen!  
**He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!**

Welcome to this reflection for the Fifth Sunday of the Easter season. In today's Gospel Jesus says; "I am the True Vine". We reflect on the image of The Vine, its fruit and what the Gospel tells us today.

Let us pray:

## Opening Prayer

Risen Christ,  
you are the vine and we are the branches.  
As the vine draws goodness from the earth;  
may your Word nourish us.  
As the leaves absorb sunlight  
to strengthen growth;  
may your Holy Spirit energise us.  
As the gardener cuts away what is fruitless;  
show us what we need to be pruned from our lives,  
to leave room for new, abundant fruits.  
Amen.

*Mike Claridge*

In the TV comedy series *Porridge*, Ronnie Barker plays a character called Norman Stanley Fletcher, serving a prison sentence at Her Majesty's Prison Slade. Although filmed on Dartmoor, Slade is a fictional prison supposedly situated in the Lake District. Another comedy great, David Jason, perhaps best known as Del Boy in *Only Fools and Horses*, also makes appearances in *Porridge*. He plays an old man - Blanco - nearing the end of his sentence. In one scene, set while they are working in the prison garden, Blanco tells Fletch how, even there in the north of England, he'd once managed to grow a grapevine - until the prison authorities stopped him. Fletch asks, "why did they do that?". "Grapes make wine don't they" says Blanco with a wink. Chateau Slade, it seems, wasn't the finest of vintages, but in the context ....

If you travel, among other places, through southern Europe you'll see mile after mile of cultivated grapevines. There are some in the UK. One's down the road in Wroxeter, Shropshire. It's called Wroxeter Roman Vineyard. Wroxeter was a large city in the days of the Roman Empire and they did grow grapes there - even as far north as Hadrian's Wall! Like Chateau Slade though there's no evidence as to what the resulting wine was like.

Today we're going to listen to a meditation on the theme of 'The Vine'. It'll be followed by our Gospel reading.

**The Vine** (by Jan Sutch Pritchard)

Close your eyes and imagine that you are a plant.  
Not any plant, a particular kind:  
a climbing, clinging plant grown against a wall,  
the sunny wall of a house in a hot country;  
but it is a country where you are at home,  
and you grow well.  
You have been planted here  
by the owner of the house  
because you will grow well  
and because you will give welcome shade.  
So a trellis has been built -  
a framework of weathered wood -  
and you have sent out your tendrils onto the trellis,  
taken hold and are growing there, too,  
your luxuriant leaves shading the terrace underneath,  
and the benches where people can sit  
in the heat of the day.

You have been here a long time.  
Your main stem is old and gnarled,  
rough to the touch but beautiful in its own way.  
Your roots are deep.  
Feeling them going down into the earth,  
unseen, but still as much part of you  
as the leaves that dance in the breeze.  
Feel your roots seeking water deep down,  
drawing nourishment into your whole being.  
Feel your leaves draw energy from the sun  
and turn it, in their cells, into strength  
for the whole of you.  
Feel your tendrils alive,  
sensitively seeking new directions  
in which you can grow,  
and holding on to rough stone and warm wood  
so that the wind does not damage you.  
Feel your fruits forming, filling out,  
becoming juicy, delicious, nourishing.  
Feel how each part of you is connected  
and draws strength from the other parts.  
Feel joy in being the healthy fruitful plant  
that God made you to be.

People are coming down the track,  
a group of people talking.  
They come to the house, stop on the terrace.  
Someone from the house brings them cool drinks.  
They sit in your shade, talking.  
Mostly they are listening to one man,

who seems to be explaining something to them.  
They look puzzled.  
Suddenly he reaches out, touches your stem,  
gestures to your leaves and fruit, and says,  
“I am the vine”

*from ‘Dandelions and Thistles’ - Biblical meditations from the Iona Community’  
Edited by Jan Sutch Pritchard*

### **John 15 .1 - 8 (NRSV)**

*A video presentation of today’s Gospel from the Revd Phil Summers  
(‘Perfect Little Gentleman’ on YouTube): [https://youtu.be/Spv\\_43GjDbc](https://youtu.be/Spv_43GjDbc)*

1 ‘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.

As we’ve seen before, vines and vineyards are often used in scripture to depict God’s people. The words of Jesus “I am the vine” is part of that theme. He is part of the long, long story of God’s people. Like an ancient vine drawing from the fertile ground of faith, scripture and tradition.

The lives of God’s people are only fruitful if they remain part of the vine. Even then sometimes they have to be pruned - to leave behind dated traditions maybe - to leave room for new growth. Pruned properly a grapevine will increase its yield.

What has lock down caused us to cut back and prune? Where can we see the new shoots of branches? What fruits will that new growth bring? Will they yield an even finer wine than we’ve already tasted?

One other thing to ponder. The fruits of real vines don’t remain on the vine or even in the vineyard. They are transformed into wine that brings life and vitality to others.

Let us pray:

### **Closing Prayer**

Heard and valued  
Freed and forgiven.

**We go into the world  
to bear much fruit.**

Fed and nourished  
Loved and cherished.

**We go into the world  
to bear much fruit.**

Today and tomorrow  
Rooted in Jesus

**We go into the world  
to bear much fruit.**

Thank you for being part of this reflection today. There's a written version on the website which you can pass onto those without internet access.

Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, stay safe, take care and remember that the best of all is that God is with us!