

Call to Worship

We gather together to worship
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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

Hymn StF 36: There's a quiet understanding (2:28)
Matt Beckingham
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DTfESpt74lg>

Welcome to our Morning Worship 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

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.
And 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

Introduction

In the TV comedy series *Porridge*, Ronnie Barker plays 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 here - even as far north as Hadrian's Wall! Like Chateau Slade though there's no evidence as to what the resufruit and lting wine was like. Sometimes the fruit of our lives is maybe not all it could be.

Let us pray:

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 you 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.

This is his gracious word.
"Your sins are forgiven"
Thanks be to God. Amen.

The next part of our service is reflective. We listen to music, then a spoken meditation and that then leads into our Gospel reading.

Hymn: Abide in the Vine (3:27)
Steve Penniman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X0uGEQ5dNB4>

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)

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.

Hymn StF 258 You are the Vine, we are the branches (3:45)
 Matt Beckingham
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=301PlhiRNx8>

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:

Prayers of Intercession

Loving, Lord God,
 help each of us to abide in you and produce fruit,
 not any old fruit, but the best fruit we can.
 Prune us back, remove those areas of our lives
 that get in the way of each other
 and help us to concentrate on the things
 you have truly called us to do.
 Help us to realise the gifts you have given us
 and how best to use them for your Kingdom.

Loving, Lord God
 may your Church be a window to you,
 that the world may see your love for all people in action.
 Bring an end to bickering,
 nit-picking and in-fighting.
 Unite your Church, give it a voice
 to challenge injustice and act with kindness.
 Make it a safe space,
 where people can reach their potential and work together.
 Help it to grow in love and produce rich fruit in abundance.

Loving, Lord God,
 we bring our world and local communities to you.
 So much conflict, hurt and suffering.
 We think of those mourning loved ones,
 those who feel isolated and cut off from family and friends
 due to the pandemic,
 those who live in fear for whatever reason.
 Bring the fruit of healing and peace to their place of need
 and instill in us a desire to be the answer to that prayer today.
 Amen.

Hymn StF 110 In the wonder of creation (3:40)
Ruth and Joy Everingham

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-DTv0f3xiM>

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.

The Grace