



Welcome to written worship for Sunday 2nd May 5th Sunday of Easter and Vocations Sunday in the Methodist Church

This Sunday we share worship adapted from material prepared for Methodists across the Connexion as we reflect together on how God is calling each one of us... You may find that these reflections connect with the worship we shared across the Circuit on the Sunday after Easter (11th April), when we asked where or how we feel at peace with God, and how God might be sending us out from that place of peace. I am encouraged that we are being invited to return to this theme of calling and sending again, in the company of others across the country.

As we begin, we pray and sing...

Praise God in his holy house of worship;
praise him under the open skies;
Praise God in our homes,
praise him in our schools and on our streets, and at our work.
Praise him for his acts of power,
praise him for his magnificent greatness;
Praise with a blast on the trumpet,
praise with music through our headphones,
Praise him with big noises,
praise him in quiet whispers.
Let every living, breathing creature praise GOD!
Hallelujah!

Hymn: Let all the world in every corner sing (H&P 10, StF 57, MP 404)

In the beginning, God made everything and saw that it was good

God of all,
We come before you today just as we are
We lift to you the joy of being alive
We praise you that we are part of your amazing Creation
Plant in us an ever-growing love for you
Let worship and praise burst from our hearts
Let the fruitfulness of our lives bring glory to you
Amen

Say the Lord's Prayer in your preferred form...

In the Bible reading we will reflect on this morning, Jesus talks about a vine. For a vine, or any plant to grow strong, and grow fruit, it needs to be well fed. Also, it sometimes needs to be pruned, helping the new branches that grow to bear more fruit. Jesus says that he is like a vine and we are like the branches. In our Bibles, the word used is to 'abide' with Jesus, this means to be connected, or plugged in. If you think of a mobile phone with low battery, it needs to be plugged in to recharge. We need to be connected well with Jesus if we are to have the full power of God.

Sometimes our phones' memory is full and we have to delete some Apps so that the phone can still work. If you've ever had to do this, it can be really hard to choose which Apps to delete and which are the really important ones to keep. This is a bit like pruning

a plant. Which branches should we remove? Similarly, as disciples of Jesus, sometimes we have to stop some of the things we do, so the really important things can happen.

What helps you to stay plugged in, connected to Jesus?

What sort of things help you to be kind, and generous and loving?

Thinking about these things might make you feel thankful ... you may like to write, doodle or speak a prayer of thanksgiving.

Are there things that fill your life but make it harder to do the right things? Things which make it hard for you to be loving and generous and kind?

Thinking about these things might make you feel uncomfortable or sad ... you may like to write, doodle or speak a prayer of confession.

Take a moment to be still and listen carefully for God's words of love for you, and God's desire to be with you as you make a new start...

Hymn: Lord God, by whom all change is wrought (H&P 39) OR God to enfold you (StF 648) OR You are the Vine, we are the branches (StF 258, MP 792)

Read: John 15:1-9

It is interesting that Jesus chooses imagery of the vine. In the Old Testament the vine is sometimes used as a symbol of the Messiah, a sign of hope, and sometimes it is used as a metaphor for Israel when the people have been found lacking in terms of their Godliness; when there is a need for change.

What we read in John chapter 15 is both hopeful, whilst making clear that we need to change. It is hopeful because we are reminded that we are interconnected with the Spirit of God through our relationship with Jesus. Some words that spring to mind are love, fruitfulness, joy, abundance, connection and abiding with.

What words come to your mind when you think of being connected through the Holy Spirit, with Jesus? What do you think it means to abide with Jesus? If we play a word association game we might go from abide, to live with, then to home, rest, safety, to family, to friends and to love. To abide in Jesus is all of that and more; we are invited to abide in all that Jesus is. If we are to abide in all that Jesus is, then we will be fully alive, we are nourished with the same life giving Spirit, we are loved, just as Jesus is loved by the Creator.

What might be the abundant fruits of a life lived like this? If we were to list them, we might include characteristics like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Today is Vocations Sunday...a vocation that is nourished in the life giving Spirit of God has fruit like this list – let's hear them again; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. However, words like calling and vocation can scare us sometimes, so maybe we might think of it like this: the primary call of a Christian is to follow Jesus, and the journey that emerges from that, for each of us, is our own unique vocation.

Do you see your journey with Jesus as a vocation? Or do you think that are vocations are just for Ministers, and nurses and teachers?

There is a story about a student who loses in his room, the watch he inherited from his granddad; he cannot find it anywhere as the room is a mess. So he goes to his neighbour's room to look for it there, as it is easier to find things in a tidy room. His teacher passes by and asks him 'why are you looking for something where it is not?'

Do we sometimes look for a sense of vocation where it is not? The Bible reading today suggests that the abundant fruit will grow where we are most connected to the vine. So on Vocations Sunday, I wonder, what happens if we look at where our life is bearing fruit and ask, 'could this be evidence of my vocation?'

Pause a minute and ask yourself: Where in life, at the moment, are signs of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?

As we noticed earlier, this Bible reading also speaks some tough words about us needing to change, to be pruned. It might be that things that were once bearing abundant fruit, that were once our vocation, are not anymore.

How do we know if some of our vocational branches are ready to be pruned? Are there things you are doing, possibly in the name of God and church, that are actually now a burden, a chore, that bring a sense of gloom, and sadly either don't bear any fruit or the fruit is no longer abundant and juicy? If so, it might be time for change, time to have those branches pruned.

Vocations Sunday isn't just about each of us as individuals and our own vocations; it is also about the vocation of the church. Where is the abundant fruit in the life of your church? And what needs to be pruned? As we emerge from lockdown, this is the time to ask, what is the vocation of the church in the time and the place we find ourselves? Is it the same as it was in 2019? Or has that which was fruitful now dried up?

We possibly have some hard decisions to make as church communities. You may have seen pictures of vines being tended... when the tractors come to prune the vines it looks brutal, but it is necessary if the vine is to grow new and delicious fruit. Our God is a God of love and a God of invitation. God waits patiently in our lives. As we work out our vocations, individually and as a community, God is waiting, but God isn't waiting like the vacuum packed grapes in the supermarket, waiting for us to open the packet and let the fruit out. God is waiting and is active. The invitation is to look, and to notice where God is at work, where there is evidence of the fruit of God's Spirit. That's where we join in.

Let us pray...

Abiding God, we lift our world to you
Holding in our hearts places where
Lives are crushed by injustice
torn up by conflict
trampled by the greed of others
May justice germinate and righteousness ripen
That all may know your abundant love

Silence to lift to God our prayers for the world....

Re-root us in you
That your Kingdom may grow through us

Nurturing God
We pray for our communities
Holding in our hearts places where
isolation, has laid waste
deprivation has parched
dreams have withered
Flow afresh through these places
That all may know
Your promise of fullness

Silence to lift to God our prayers for our communities ...

Re-root us in you
That your Kingdom may grow through us

Life-giving God,
We pray for our Church
Where apathy diseases:
Plant in us a dis-ease with all that stifles your Spirit
Where lack of vision is causing your people to perish:
Graft us to into your limitless love
Where weariness withers:
Revive us with the light of Jesus

Silence to lift to God our prayers for the Church...

Re root us in you
That your Kingdom may grow through us

We pray for ourselves and the concerns of our hearts,
Lifting them in silence to you...

Prune us to be ready to respond to you
Re-wild us with your ever-flowing grace
Graft us to you, that we may bear much fruit

Re-root us in you
That your Kingdom may grow through us
Amen

Hymn: I will offer up my life (StF 446, MP 990) OR Breathe on me breath of God (StF 370, H&P 280, MP 67)

May each tree we see this week be a reminder of the connection we have with the Creator of that tree. May each piece of fruit we eat be a reminder of the goodness of the Spirit of God nurturing us.

We go in peace to bear fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control;

And may we, those we love, those for whom we pray
know the blessing of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, this day and every day. Amen