

Sunday 2nd May 2021

Rev'd Jenny Pathmarajah – “Vocations Sunday” (5th of Easter)

*This short act of worship has been prepared for you to use whilst we are unable to use Methodist Church premises.
We invite you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you.*

Call to worship

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!

StF 057

Let all the world in every corner sing

Let all the world in every corner sing:
My God and King!
The heavens are not too high,
His praise may thither fly;
The earth is not too low,
His praises there may grow.
Let all the world in every corner sing:
My God and King!
Let all the world in every corner sing:
My God and King!
The church with psalms must shout,
No door can keep them out;
But above all, the heart
Must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in every corner sing:
My God and King!

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Opening prayers

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

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 to the Reflection:

In the Bible reading we will hear soon, Jesus talks about a Vine. This is a plant, which grows grapes. For a vine, or any plant to grow strong, and grow fruit, it needs to be well fed.

Also, it sometimes needs its branches cutting shorter, this is called pruning because this helps the new branch that grows to have more fruit.

Jesus says in the reading 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 is 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. Similarly, as disciples of Jesus, sometimes we have to stop some of the things we do, so the really important things can happen.

Can you think of things you do that help you to stay plugged in to Jesus? What sort of things help you to be kind, and generous and loving?

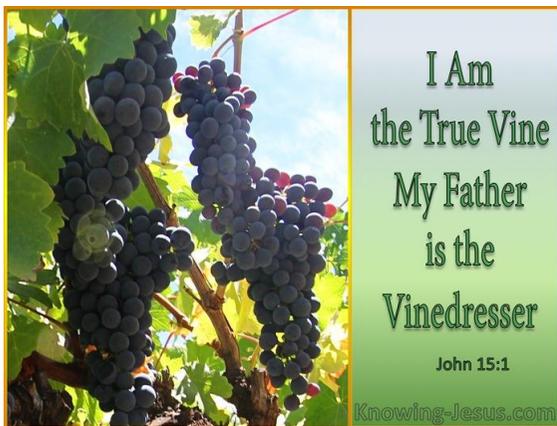
Maybe make a list or draw the things that help you be like Jesus and be plugged in to Jesus. What things at school or work, at home and church help you to be loving and generous and kind?

Thinking about these things might make you feel thankful – that's good. Tell Jesus about that -

- it's a thank you prayer.

Can you think of things that fill your life but make it hard to do the right things? What things at school or work, at home and church make it hard for you to be loving and generous and kind?

Maybe make a list, or draw those things too – it might make you sad, but that's ok. You can talk to Jesus about it **- that's a sorry prayer.**



Read John 15:1-9

The Vine and the Branches

"I am the true vine,
and my Father is the gardener.
He cuts off every branch in me
that bears no fruit,
while every branch that does bear fruit
he prunes so that it will be
even more fruitful.
You are already clean because of the
word I have spoken to you.

Remain in me, as I also remain in you.
No branch can bear fruit by itself;
it must remain in the vine.
Neither can you bear fruit
unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine;
you are the branches.
If you remain in me and I in you,
you will bear much fruit;
apart from me you can do nothing.
If you do not remain in me,
you are like a branch
that is thrown away and withers;
such branches are picked up,
thrown into the fire and burned.
If you remain in me
and my words remain in you,
ask whatever you wish,
and it will be done for you.
This is to my Father’s glory,
that you bear much fruit,
showing yourselves
to be my disciples.
“As the Father has loved me,
so have I loved you.
Now remain in my love.

Reflection

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. The words that spring to my 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 I play a word association game I go from abide, to live with, then I think of home, then of rest, then of 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.

f 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 do you think are the abundant fruits of a life lived like this?

If we were to list them, they might be characteristics like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Today is Vocations Sunday and I think a vocation that is nourished in the life giving Spirit of God would have 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 I 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 grandad; 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 mentioned 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 you and me 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.

My brother-in law lives on a vineyard in France, and 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.

StF 446

I will offer up my life

In spirit and truth, Pouring out the oil of love as my worship to You.
In surrender I must give my every part;
Lord, receive the sacrifice
Of a broken heart.

*Jesus, what can I give, what can I bring
To so faithful a friend,
to so loving a King?*

*Saviour, what can be said,
what can be sung
As a praise of Your name
For the things You have done?
Oh, my words could not tell,
not even in part, Of the debt of love
that is owed by this thankful heart.*

You deserve my every breath
For You've paid the great cost;
Giving up Your life to death,
Even death on a cross.
You took all my shame away,
There defeated my sin,
Opened up the gates of heaven,
And have beckoned me in.

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Intercessions

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

In silence we 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

In silence we 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

In silence we 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

Offering

Creator God, you made the plants and
trees, the people and the animals. We
want to say thank you for all of that
and more, by sharing what we have
with others. The money we give is a
symbol of our thanks to you for all you
have made and all that you are. Amen

StF 663

I the Lord of Sea and Sky

I have heard my people cry.
All who dwell in dark and sin my hand
will save.

I who made the stars of night,
I will make their darkness bright.
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the
night. I will go, Lord, if you lead me.
I will hold your people in my heart.*

I, the Lord of snow and rain,
I have borne my people's pain.
I have wept for love of them.
They turn away.
I will break their hearts of stone,
give them hearts for love alone.
I will speak my word to them.
Whom shall I send?

I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame.
I will set a feast for them.
My hand will save.
Finest bread I will provide
till their hearts be satisfied.
I will give my life to them.
Whom shall I send?

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Blessing

May each tree

you see this week
be a reminder of
the connection you have
with the Creator of that tree.

May each piece of fruit you eat
be a reminder of the goodness
of the Spirit of God nurturing
you. Go in peace to bear fruit of
love, joy, peace, patience,
kindness, generosity,
faithfulness, gentleness
and self-control. **Amen**