

The Vine at Home 10.1.21

Call to worship

As we settle into the rhythm of 2021, we gather in your presence.

As a new week begins, we come to worship you.

As a new service starts, we seek to encounter your grace.

As we enter into this moment, we pray for transformation by your Spirit, O Lord. Amen.

Hymn: 152 STF This is the day

Opening Prayers

Lord, as we prepare for worship, let your presence come in Jesus' name. We meet as a family, welcoming each other with open hearts and minds. We ask that your Holy Spirit work within us and make yourself known to us today through our worship, prayers and the reading of your word. Bless our worship today. May we hear you speaking. Help us to have you as the focus of all that we are. Amen.

We say together the Lord's Prayer

Readings:

Genesis 1:1-5 - Six Days of Creation and the Sabbath

¹ In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, ² the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. ³ Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. ⁴ And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵ God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Acts 19:1-17 Paul in Ephesus

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. ² He said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?" They replied, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit." ³ Then he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They answered, "Into John's baptism." ⁴ Paul said, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus." ⁵ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied— ⁷ altogether there were about twelve of them.

⁸ He entered the synagogue and for three months spoke out boldly, and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God. ⁹ When some stubbornly refused to believe and spoke evil of the Way before the congregation, he left them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. ¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord.

¹¹ God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹² so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them. ¹³ Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." ¹⁴ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵ But the evil spirit said to them in reply, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered them all, and so overpowered them that they fled out of the house naked and wounded. ¹⁷ When this became known to all residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, everyone was awestruck; and the name of the Lord Jesus was praised.

Mark 1:4-11

⁴ John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷ He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸ I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Reflections on the readings

Today's reflection comes from Revd Carla Quenet.

Have you ever noticed how some people's voices simply seem to be able to command a situation instantly? It is not necessarily the person with the loudest, strongest, most booming voice that does this. Rather, it is often the softly and gently spoken individual whose voice demands greatest attention. It seems counterintuitive to many but adding a raised voice to an already fractious situation seldom brings resolution.

Have you ever heard people of peace speak? What words did they use? How did their physical voice sound? How did you/others respond?

Today's readings remind us of the power of the voice and speech (but not necessarily just that of humans):

In Genesis 1:1-4 we hear how God begins to speak creation into being, first separating light and dark. In verse 3 we read: "*Then God **said**, 'Let there be light', and there was light.*"

Notice the creative power of God displayed in the seemingly simple yet profound act of speech. We are then told that God goes on to name the light day, and the dark, night. Fundamental rhythms that we continue to experience as humans and could be defined as the basis of life.

Read Genesis 1:1-4 again and as you do, encourage yourself (and others) to reflect on the passage by asking 'I wonder' questions. For example, 'I wonder if God's voice was audible?' or 'I wonder why God spoke when no other living thing was present?'

In Psalm 29 we hear the voice of God but this time we find it within the context of a storm. The Psalmist raises their praise to God, opening the Psalm with:

Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.

Ascribe to the Lord the glory of his name; worship the Lord in holy splendour.

Or as The Message writes: Bravo, God, bravo! Gods and all angels shout, "Encore!" In awe before the glory, in awe before God's visible power. Stand at attention! Dress your best to honour him!

Both versions clearly communicate the awesome nature of God and recognise what our response ought to be. Yet enveloped within this text there seems to be the feeling that the voice of God is less to be feared and more to be respected. The voice of God alone can do more than humans ever hope to do even if they used all the resources available to them. The Psalm doesn't end with a call for people to revere God, but instead we are offered the prayerful and encouraging words:

"May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace." (Psalm 29:11, NRSV).

We are reminded in the midst of the noise, chaos and drama of the storm that God can and does distil peace.

Have you ever experienced the peace of God within a stormy period of your life? How did it feel? How did you respond?

In Acts 19 we meet a group of disciples in Corinth. They have clearly misunderstood the message which John the Baptist proclaimed as they were living out their faith with an obscured understanding. Paul reminds them of the need to be baptised into Christ and to be filled with the Holy Spirit. When Paul lays hands upon those gathered they proceed to speak in tongues and prophesied; surely in this act they both praised and were encouraged to point people towards the triune God.

The passage continues, notice, and we are told that Paul goes and speaks boldly in the synagogue for three months, arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God. Paul clearly perseveres with this congregation, before he finally leaves when people stubbornly refused to listen; but his act of proclamation, alongside these disciples continued until all of Asia had heard the good news.

Have you ever experienced a situation where people stubbornly refused to listen? What did you do? Why? What would motivate you to continue sharing the Good News?

Today's readings beautifully and profoundly remind us the wonder of a voice. We are reminded of the awesome nature of God, that he simply spoke creation into being. We are reminded of the power of God in the way his voice is heard in the midst of a mighty storm. We recognise, through the role of John the Baptist, the part we can play in proclaiming God but yet we need to be cautious that we share the message in such a way that those who hear fully comprehend. Communication goes beyond words alone, we perhaps notice this in the very act of creation.

In what ways has God called you to communicate the Good News and point people to Jesus? How will you respond?

Prayers of intercession

Father God, we thank you for your gift of creation. We praise you for the beauty and goodness you have made. We pray that we may be filled with a spirit of concern for our environment and resources. Help us to pursue responsible stewardship, protecting and redeeming the habitats of the earth you have created. We pray for those countries in Latin America where extensive deforestation is causing decreasing biodiversity through habitat loss.

We hold in our hearts people involved in agriculture in the UK. Help us continue to provide the best standards of care for our farm animals, advocating for high welfare in our food supply chains even in an uncertain market.

Guide our governments to be key forces in addressing climate change and enabling large companies to be prioritising sustainable methods of production and distribution, leading by example.

Lead our scientists, innovating ways to help reduce our impact on your planet, give them wisdom and keep encouraging their work to restore the planet. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Hymn: 351 STF In Christ alone

Blessing

The God of all mysterious grace go with you. The Creator, who became human, and who lives as Spirit, go with you. From the dawning of each new day, until the setting of the sun, may God go with you. Amen.