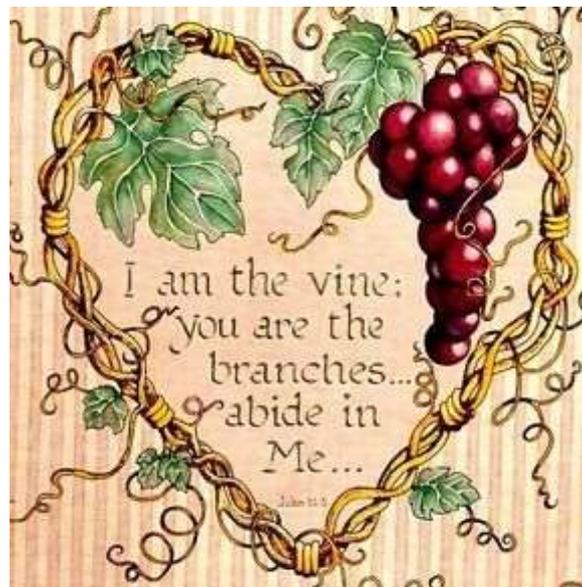




**Reflections & Prayers
for the fifth Sunday of Easter 2021**



StJohnsAL5

www.stjohnsharpenden.org.uk

Thought for the week

Jesus said: “I am the true vine: if you abide in me, you will bear much fruit”.

In this parable, Jesus warns his disciples and us that we need to be like the branches of a vine that depend for their very existence on being fed by the vine. At times we will need to be pruned, to save us from straying but if we abide with Jesus and look to him for his living spirit day by day then he will abide in us and will grant our requests.

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Readings for this Sunday

These are the readings for this Sunday which you may like to read in your bibles at home.

Acts 8: 26-40

1 John 4: 7-21

John 15: 1-8

Jesus the True Vine

‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 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. 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. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide

in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Reflection from David Nye

When I retired, I decided to start growing vegetables in our garden. I had a modest degree of success. Emboldened by this, I thought I would also grow some raspberries. "Make sure you prune them properly" I was told. So I looked in a gardening book to learn how to prune raspberries. It turns out, it's not entirely straightforward. It depends on whether you have the summer variety or the autumn variety. I went to look at what I had bought. On the label it just said "Mid". So what is that? All a little bit frustrating because I do know that pruning is vital if you want to get the best crop.

Our gospel reading was all about pruning a vine. The picture of a vine would be completely familiar to the disciples and indeed to all Jews. The Old Testament is full of pictures of a vine as an image of Israel. God had planted it and watered it. He had tended it and looked for fruit from his chosen and cherished people. Sadly, he was often disappointed. Things didn't go according to plan. So God sent them Jesus as the new vine.

In other words, the old vine, the unreliable, the unfaithful, the unproductive vine has been replaced by Jesus who is the true vine. He is the new Israel and he will gather his people as the branches of the tree. Just like my raspberry canes, this new vine will still need to be pruned: the dead wood will need to be cut off and the fruitful branches will need cutting back so that they can grow even more.

Jesus explains that if we want to remain with him, if we want to bear fruit like the disciples, then we have to abide with him. We have to remain part of the vine so that we can continually be fed by him who is the source of all life. If we do that, then we too will flourish, we too will grow in faith as followers of Christ. If on the other hand we try to go it alone, if we don't abide in him, we will become separated and we will wither and die.

So how do we respond to this challenge to remain part of the vine or as the gospel puts it, how do we abide in Jesus? Jesus is giving us an invitation for

us to stay with him, to be part of him, to remain with him. In the same way, he will abide within us, he will become part of us, he will remain with us.

The writer David Winter puts it like this “Jesus makes his home in our lives; our lives find their home in him. In the end, the issue is never about rules and regulations, but about relationship: he in us and we in him”. That’s the crucial point; the Christian life is all about this mysterious relationship with our Saviour. We are to abide in him and he will abide in us.

How do we do this; how **do** we abide in him? It seems to me that it really boils down to following God’s commandments; loving God and loving our neighbour.

What follows will not be news to you. You’ve heard it before but we often need reminding.

Constantly we need to deepen our faith. If we are able, we can do this best by meeting together as worshipping Christians, by praying together, by giving thanks together, by saying sorry together, by reading and understanding the scriptures together, by taking communion together.

Just as vital is talking to God and listening to him through private prayer. Everyday, we should try to spend a few minutes getting to know him better by reading our bible and by saying our prayers. Or just being still. That’s the only way we will understand more about our God and his love for us and so in return show our love for him.

We also have to love our neighbour. Remember those words from St Matthew’s gospel; when I was thirsty did you give me anything to drink; when I was hungry did you give me anything to eat; when I was a stranger did you welcome me; when I was ill did you care for me; when I was in prison did you visit me. That’s the challenge for us; to treat each other as though they were Christ; to care for each other in the same way we would want others to care for us.

Jesus in our gospel reading tells us “If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish and it will be done for you”. What an amazing offer! God will answer our prayers if we become part of him and allow him to become part of us.

Trying to live as a Christian is challenging: but our Lord and saviour wants to help us when we need help; to comfort us when we feel alone; to support us when we feel problems weighing us down.

Today we have a choice; to be alive in God, to grow in love for God and for each other, to experience his unending love for us – or to ignore him and not be alive at all. The choice is ours.

Prayers

Collect for the Fifth Sunday of Easter

Risen Christ,
your wounds declare your love for the world
and the wonder of your risen life:
give us compassion and courage
to risk ourselves for those we serve,
to the glory of God the Father.

True God, true vine,
Strength of all our being,
Giver of all good gifts,
Healer of all that is broken:
We worship you;
We glorify you;
We rejoice in you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Come, my Light, and illumine my darkness.
Come, my Life, and revive me from death.
Come, my Physician, and heal my wounds.
Come, Flame of divine love, and burn up the thorns of my sins,
kindling my heart with the flame of your love.
Come, my King, sit upon the throne of my heart and reign there,
for you alone are my King and my Lord.

Support us, O Lord,
all the day long of this troublous life,
until the shadows lengthen and the evening comes,

the busy world is hushed,
the fever of life is over
and our work is done.
Then, Lord, in your mercy grant us a safe lodging,
a holy rest, and peace at the last;
through Christ our Lord.

Parish Prayers for the week ahead

In the Anglican Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	The Episcopal Church in Jerusalem & The Middle East
Monday	The Diocese of Central Buganda – The Church of the Province of Uganda
Tuesday	The Diocese of West Buganda – The Church of the Province of Uganda
Wednesday	The Diocese of Buhiga – The Anglican Church of Burundi
Thursday	The Diocese of Bujumbura – The Anglican Church of Burundi
Friday	The Diocese of Bukavu – Province of the Anglican Church of the Congo
Saturday	The Diocese of Bukedi – The Church of the Province of Uganda

In our Diocesan Cycle of Prayer:

Sunday	The Reaching New People Team
Monday	Chaplains within Educational Establishments
Tuesday	Parish of Sawbridgeworth (Deanery of Bishop's Stortford)
Wednesday	Parish of Standon (Deanery of Bishop's Stortford)
Thursday	Parish of Stocking Pelham (Deanery of Bishop's Stortford)
Friday	Parish of Thorley (Deanery of Bishop's Stortford)
Saturday	Parish of Anstey (Deanery of Buntingford)

For the homes and families in:

Sunday	Alzey Gardens
Monday	Aran Close, Ashcroft Close
Tuesday	Barlings Road, Barnfield Road
Wednesday	Barrons Row, Beech Close
Thursday	Beeson End Land, Bewdley Close
Friday	Birch Way, Bowling Close
Saturday	Broadstone Road, Burnsall Place

The Sick:

Amy, Claire, Sue, Christine, Hermione, Karen, Chris, John and all whose names are entered on our St Luke's Cell Prayer List.

For the recently deceased:

Lorna McGown

On their year's mind:

Peggy Garratt, Peter Mansfield, Paul Crake, Felicity Hogan, Dorothy Gordon, Maggie Bloor,

[An update on recruitment from James Hillman and Tom Venner](#)

We are very pleased to report that we have had a large number of applications for the post of our new incumbent. Following a meeting with Bishop Michael, Archdeacon Jane and members of the selection panel last week, we are asking four candidates to attend our interview day on 6 May and now have more clarity on the arrangements.

The interview day will take the form of a "carousel" with each candidate seeing the Ministry team, being interviewed, and taking part in a number of other activities. This will therefore be a busy day for us and, similar to our process three years ago, we are seeking help with welcoming and steering the candidates around the parish and around the groups, providing catering for the interview team, and with the population of a small study group. This will all be complicated by the fact that we are coinciding with local election day!

A reminder... of this phone service:

Daily Hope – dial 0800 804 8044 for prayer, reflection, music and worship services from the Church of England. A weekly service is available from 9 am every Sunday.

Church at home:

We are delighted to produce each week these printed papers. If you would prefer not to receive these papers each week, please let Julie in the parish office know. If you are aware of others in the parish who would also value the opportunity to worship at home in this way, do please contact a member of the Ministry team or Julie (Parish Office Tel: 01582 712776).