

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home
Sunday 9th May 2021

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

God first chose us, cared for us, loved us. As children of God we are privileged to call him 'Abba, Father'. As sons and daughters of God, let us bring our worship to God, by whom we are all one, in union with Christ Jesus.

Hymn/Song

Prayer

How deeply you have loved us, Jesus;
how willingly you stepped into our experience,
how completely you empathised with all that we endure.
Teach us to love as you have loved us.
How sacrificially you have loved us, Jesus;
how completely you gave yourself for us,
how courageously you suffered for our sakes.
Teach us to love as you have loved us.
How restoratively you have loved us, Jesus;
how generously you share your life,
how extravagantly you make yourself available to us.
Teach us to love as you have loved us.
We praise you for your love which is given so freely and so unconditionally.
And we thank you for believing that we could learn to offer such love to each other. **Amen.**

Bible Readings

1 John Chapter 5 verses 1-6

John chapter 15 verses 1- 17

The Vine and The Branches

I am the Vine and you the branches,
pruned and prepared for all to see;
chosen to bear the fruit of heaven,
if you remain and trust in Me.

For on your own, what can you dare?
Left to yourself no sap you share;
branches that serve their own desire
find themselves broken as fuel for fire!

So let My joy complete and cheer you,
in whom My hope and kingdom lies:
loving each other as I loved you,
savour that love which never dies.

Though as a servant to you I came,
you are not summoned to bear that name.
I call you friends; you are My choice;
in you I trust, and in you rejoice!

(Words from The Iona Community)

Hymn/Song

Sermon

We give thanks today for Christ the true vine.

I want to explore some of the depth of meaning this image has for us. Let us consider three aspects.

Firstly, the vine is an **ancient** Vine.

The image of the vine was a vivid one for Jesus' disciples, since the land of Israel was covered with vineyards.

The vine was used in the Old Testament as a symbol for Israel's relationship with God.

Isaiah spoke of the house of Israel as the vineyard of the Lord (5:7).

Jeremiah said that God had planted Israel as His choice vine (2:21).

The prophet Hosea pointed out that because of Israel's unfaithfulness to God, they had become like an empty vine. This is the story of the Lord's people. They are the vineyard of the Lord Almighty.

From beginning to end, God's role is the Vinedresser – the expert gardener. Down through Hebrew history, the grapevine became the symbol of Israel. The Vine has ancient roots. It is an ancient vine. But Jesus gave the vine new meaning. Jesus said, "I am the *true* vine." Perhaps He meant something like this:

"You know that the vine is symbolic of Israel that is supposed to produce luscious grapes. Well, the nation has failed to do so.

I, on the other hand, am the authentic Vine.

I am the fulfilment of everything suggested by the symbol."

So the symbol of Christ as the true vine speaks to us about fulfilment. Jesus' portrayal of himself as the vine and 'you' as the branches and the Father as the gardener is a powerful symbol. It speaks of unity and harmony.

Those who are baptised into Christ are 'grafted into him'.

The second aspect of this image is how the vine is a **living** vine.

Jesus is alive! Our life is in him!

The single most important thing for us as Christians is to maintain our vital connection to Jesus, the living Vine.

We are to maintain our closeness of relationship with Jesus.

Jesus said it this way, Remain in me, and I will 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.

The King James Version (and others) use the word "abide" rather than "remain," but it really doesn't make a lot of difference.

The word means "to maintain a union, to maintain an unbroken connection." It is an important concept: John used the word abide (or a derivative) over 50 times in his writings in the New Testament, and eleven times in John 15 alone.

This call to abide in Christ is an encouragement to keep growing a relationship with him. How?

Through listening to God, examining our hearts & our lifestyle, through prayer, & worship, through reading his word, through regular fellowship with other Christians, through practical service and giving of ourselves, being his witnesses, we abide in Christ, we remain in Christ.

He is the living vine the source of our life.

This brings me to my final aspect for today.

This is a **fruitful** vine.

Our relationship with Jesus is for a purpose –to bear fruit.

Abiding in Christ makes us fruitful as Christians.

The fruit of the Spirit grows and is seen in us over the years as we abide in Christ.

And we and others begin to see in our lives change and growth, which reveal these fruit of the Holy Spirit that St Paul describes: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness & self-control.

We can produce these fruit of the Spirit only as we remain attached to Jesus and draw our life from Him.

Abiding means change and growth.

Indeed change is the sign of Growth. It is the rule of nature.

For a plant, a child, the Christian. Change is the sign of Growth.

So we shouldn't fear change but embrace it and look for the fruit it will bear in us.

Yes, these fruit of the Spirit are for the benefit and building up of not only our own character, but are gifts for others.

The vine, like Christ, is selfless and its fruits are gifts given away to bring joy, pleasure and sustenance, so it is with us as we abide in the Vine and bear fruit for others.

What keeps us fruitful is God's work of **pruning**.

So finally a word about pruning.

It's a part of life and growth, a part of abiding in Christ.

This is my understanding of pruning.

Sometimes in life there are seasons of pruning, different for each Christian, times when we are stripped back, and it is painful.

It may make us sad or angry.

We feel a sense of loss & vulnerability and inadequacy.

At these times we discover our utter need for God and yet we confess we don't understand everything or see the whole picture.

At these times we discover what is really essential; as much is cut away.

At these times we see no fruit, even less, no sign of a bud or a shoot of new life or growth, times when we are laid bare before God.

We may feel cut down and cut off. What shall we do?

At times like these we look not to what is on the surface but what lies beneath.

All we can say is the root is still firmly in place, our roots of faith which run deep in God and we have to trust God that new life & new fruit will come in God's time.

Pruning is undergoing God's surgery.

Pruning is a part of abiding.

We may not welcome it but it is a season of growth just as much as the fruit bearing seasons of our Christian life.

To close in summary, today we give thanks for Christ the true vine; The ancient Vine, fulfilment of ancient promise.

We give thanks for Christ the living vine;

That we are grafted in and share his risen life, which flows through us. In harmony and intimacy we discover in our Friendship with Christ. We give thanks for Christ the fruitful vine;

For the fruitfulness over the years, fruit to be given away.

Even giving thanks for the pruning by our Heavenly Father the vinedresser, and trust that he will bring forth fruit in his time.

Our prayer today is Lord, help us to always abide in you , knowing that you will always abide with us, whatever comes to pass.

Amen.

Prayer of Response

God says: I am the vine.

I am your origin, your nutrients, your mainstay.

Root yourself in me.

Let yourself be fed.

Let yourself grow...closer and deeper.

And in the growing, allow the pruning.

Allow me to prune, to trim, to cut away your broken branches, your fruitless parts,

your strivings,

branches that are going to seed.

And watch and wait.

Wait for the new shoots.

Wait for the new fruits to bud slowly and open gently.

Turn to my warmth, and let your fruits open in my glory.

Amen.

Hymn/Song

Prayers of Intercession

Loving God, vine grower and creator, in your branches we are nestled, taking shelter and sustenance in the shade of your strength.

With thanksgiving we celebrate the growth and hope we have found in placing our roots in you, for in life you nourish us and your Holy Spirit encourages us to reach our full potential in the gifts we have been given that others may know of your love.

Lord, save us from producing sour grapes.

In the hardships of the world may we look beyond the bitter politics and divisions to find your love at the core of our relationships.

May all people work with what we have in common that we might grow to be a people of respect and trust.

May our branches bow with the weight of the fruit you have bestowed. Help us to look beyond our own needs, to recognise those who are hungry for food, love and justice.

May we offer others the shelter needed under the weight of your branches so they find a rest from the cold and darkness, the hatred and loneliness of this world.

Instead may your Spirit enable us to value the gifts and talents of all. Rain upon us your living water.

May our leaves soak up your light.

When we meet those who are worn down with illness, loneliness, grief and abandonment, may the light of your presence shine in the encounters they have with others that all might know your compassion.

Gardener of all life, as you prune and shape us for your purpose, may we place our prayers into your hands and trust that new buds may grow from the established branches of your church.

We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ, the True Vine.

Amen.

Unite your prayers with the whole church as you pray

The Lord's Prayer. 'Our Father...'

Hymn/Song

The Blessing

We offer our lives and our gifts to the Lord.
Father God help us to bear the best fruit we can, to your glory.
Let us daily growth receive. More in Jesus Christ believe.
Be blessed and be rooted in Jesus Christ, drawing strength from
the vine of his life, today, in the week ahead and always. **Amen.**

Coffee Time Conversation

- What did you last prune and when?
- From your experience, how do you understand God's pruning?
- What new fruit do you desire God to grow?

Suggested Hymns and Songs

More Traditional Music:

Blessed Assurance
Trust and Obey
Abide with me

More Contemporary Music:

Abba Father
No longer slaves
I am a friend of God

Keep social distancing.
Keep safe.
Keep communicating.
Keep celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord.
God bless you and keep you until we meet again.
My prayers are with you.

With love,

Peter