

## Greeting

### Call to Worship

We worship the God who inhabits our world and dwells in our lives.

**We need not look up to find God, we need only to look around: within ourselves, beyond ourselves, into the eyes of another.**

We need not listen for a distant thunder to find God, we need only listen to the music of life, the words of children, the questions of the curious, the rhythm of a heartbeat.

**We worship the God who inhabits our world and who dwells in our lives.**

### Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Christ Jesus, you are the vine, and we are the branches. Your love is our strength.

Your energy is our joy. Your attentiveness is our hope.

Your power can transform even the most difficult situations. You nourish our faith and imaginations so that we can bear fruit in many ways. You promise we can dwell in you because you are dwelling in us. We gather today to offer our praise to you, and bring glory to God the Father, through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Fill us with the love you know as God, ever Three and ever One, so that our love will honour you each and every day.

**We carry our fears around with us afraid to let them go, even when you would take them and toss them aside. You invite us to sit and chat with someone who wants to know more about you, but we are busy running errands. You give us a simple command—to love—and we complicate it with rules, worries, and doubts. Forgive us, Vine Grower. You have planted those seeds of mercy, of hope, of grace deep within us, so we might bear rich and nourishing fruit for others. May we not get in the way of your Gardener, Jesus Christ, who will use the Holy Spirit to bring forth an abundant crop.**

### Assurance of Pardon

God abides in you! God is breathing, living, forgiving, restoring you in this moment, and in the days to come. This is the good news for us!

**As God is in us, so we can live, work, care for others, so that love, hope and joy might touch all people. Thanks be to God, we are forgiven. Amen.**

## Children's Time

**Hymn:** You are the Vine

### Prayer for Understanding

God of New Life, enlighten our minds and kindle our hearts with the presence of your Spirit, That we may hear your words of comfort and challenge in the reading of the scriptures. Amen.

### First Scripture Reading: 1 John 4: 7-13

<sup>7</sup>Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup>God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup>In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God

lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. <sup>13</sup>By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

**Second Scripture Reading: John 15: 1-8**

<sup>1</sup>"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. <sup>2</sup>He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

**Reflection:** The Rev. Joan Scandrett

Did you notice that the word abide is found in both readings we heard this morning? I like that word abide. To me it speaks of connection, and staying and spending time, and permanence.

In our first reading from 1 John, the author was writing to members of an early church community who were experiencing conflict about boundaries, ways of thinking, and who could belong in their church. People were working against each other, trying to get their point across. The writer was attempting to remind people that everything begins with love, and that it is through love that God has chosen to communicate with us. God did this by sending Jesus into our experience to show us how to love, and to reveal the way to love authentically. Rather than being a community divided by different theologies and positions, the writer says the focus for followers of Christ is to abide in love and to trust that the answers will be revealed in love and through love. When we abide in love we invite God into our lives. When we abide in God, we are empowered to seek our place in this world, loving others without fear, living into the mission of the Church, restoring all people to unity with God and each other in Christ. To learn to love this way, and to live in love requires a connection – a connection to God and to each other – and it requires time – time to grow, time to learn, time to be corrected. And that happens only when we abide – when we stay with it and become immersed in it.

That brings us to today's reading from John's gospel... the familiar passage about the vine and the branches. The context of the story is that Jesus is giving these words to his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion. He knows what is going to happen to himself, and to his beloved flock. They are about to be cut down by his crucifixion and death, and they will scatter in fear. With his words he is assuring them that they will survive this terrible time because he is connected to them and they are connected to him. The people John was writing to had in fact already been scattered, thrown out of their synagogue, persecuted for being followers of Christ, and were feeling lost, abandoned and without hope. John reminds them of Jesus words, assuring them that even though they have been cut down, there will be new and abundant life for them because Christ abides in them, and they abide in Christ and with one another.

Sometimes words of promise are difficult to believe in a time of trauma or distress, especially when we can see no signs that anything is about to change. But amid uncertainty and distress, Jesus still invites us – actually, not just invites but *promises* us – that he will not abandon us but rather will cling to us like a vine clings to a tree so that we endure,

persevere, and flourish even when things are difficult. This is the promise Jesus gives, that he will always be with us, and will not let us go. Jesus says abide in me, as I abide in you. That takes away the sting of some of the other words about pruning and withering – although it is true that when we are separated from Jesus' love, we run away in fear, or hide or think we can go it alone. Branches don't do all that well when they are separated from the vine. Without connection to a life source, abundant life is not possible. Jesus is our life source, and abundant life is found when he abides in us and we in him. But even if we let Jesus go, we have the assurance that he abides in us – and he won't ever let us go.

I'm conscious that we are hearing these readings against the backdrop of spring, when signs of new life and the abundance of beauty is all around us. Yet some of our joy and excitement and anticipation is being swallowed up because we continue to be in the midst of a pandemic – the pandemic that means we can't hug our grandchildren or parents, or visit our loved ones who are in hospital, or have dinner with friends in a restaurant, or see each other in church, or travel outside our health region, or even visit inside the homes of friends. While we've learned a lot over the past year and a bit of the pandemic, we have also lost a lot. Those losses have hurt us, drained us, and discouraged us. And sometimes it feels like we are at risk of becoming disconnected from our source and from one another. The pruning has been pretty severe, don't you think?

These days we are living in kind of remind me of the rose bush I inherited when we moved into our condo. It was huge, and each time I walked by it, I got grabbed by one or more of its massive thorns. Once, when I got too close, a thorn made a big rip in the sleeve of my jacket. It wasn't producing many flowers, and was taking space in the little bit of yard that I have. And so I decided I'd prune it. I had to put on 2 pairs of gloves to avoid those thorns. I got out my clippers and went to work and by the time I was finished and stood back to take a look, I was horrified at what I'd done. It was basically just a stalk with a few branches sticking out at the bottom. For the rest of the summer it looked horrible. And during the winter I was sure I had killed it. But in the spring a miracle happened. New shoots began to grow out of the stalk, and leaves began to form, and form in abundance. And then, I noticed there were buds all over the place, and before I knew it, there were literally dozens of beautiful roses blooming. It was astounding.

Resurrection people don't need to be afraid of those pruning times. Resurrection people know that pruning a faded flower can lead to a whole new bouquet. Because we know that the abundant, overwhelming and surpassing love of God flourishes from the vine to and through the branches. Jesus, love embodied, connects us all as beloved of God...we are the recipients and carriers of love. We know that love surrounds us, upholds us, nourishes us and refreshes us. And that love makes us love, both noun and verb...who we are and what we do. Resurrection people know that no one can go it alone. We need God, and we need each other, and we will only grow in healthy relationship and fruitfulness through our abiding in the vine and the vinegrower and branching out. In that context, we abide in the promise that new life will come for us out of these pandemic times – in fact new leaves have been forming already as we learn and struggle and grow and see signs of new life in these perplexing days.

So take heart from our readings for today. Abide in them, for we are not alone, but in a community that is founded and formed in love. Someone once said that the measure of love is to love without measure.

And so, beloved, Be loved. Be love. Amen.

**Hymn:** Love Lifted Me

### **Invitation to the Offering**

Holy Spirit, move in us as we listen to the scriptures be read and interpreted. Open our minds and hearts to receive the Living Word so that we may be transformed to live grounded and rooted in your love. Amen.

### **Prayer of Dedication**

Generous God, we thank you for your gift of life renewed through Christ's love, and through springtime growth in fields and gardens. Bless the gifts we offer you. May they bring hope and renewal to others as we serve in the name of your greatest gift, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Vine of life, 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.

Make us more than sour grapes and unripe olives. 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. There 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 recognize 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.

We give our thanks for the hope of vaccinations that will stop the spread of the Covid virus; We pray for all who are working in the health care field, that their strength can be sustained and their care continue to make a difference. We pray for all who are finding this time of isolation difficult.

We give you thanks for our congregation; for those who lead, and those who use their gifts in worship each week. We ask your blessing on the members of the Search Committee; and our Interim Moderator Cathy Victor. May they each be blessed in the work they do, and the witness they give.

We pray for our loved ones, and in a time of silence, we now place before you the concerns on our hearts this day ...*(silence is held)*

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 we have with others that all might know your compassion.

Gardener of all life, as you trim and shape us for your purpose may we place our prayers into your hands

and trust that new seeds may grow into vibrant and beautiful plants, nourished in your love. Our prayers we offer in the name of Christ Jesus who taught us to pray:

**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 debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.**

### **Benediction**

Go now, and love one another, because love is from God. Proclaim God's salvation to every generation.

Remain in Jesus Christ, and like branches of a vine, draw your life from him.

And may God the vine grower tend you and make you fruitful; May Christ Jesus abide in you and give you life; And may the Holy Spirit cast out all fear and fill you with God's love. Amen.