

## Worship at home

August 22, 2021

*Thanks to Hannah Marnoch and Doug White for providing music for this week*



### **God calls us to worship:**

Our help is in the name of the Lord,  
who made heaven and earth.

Let us worship God.

### **We bring our praise and confessions:**

God of majesty and mystery,  
we come before you in humble wonder and worship.  
Source of all that is,  
you are beyond our imagining;  
your creation astounds us with its beauty and power.  
Word of hope and healing,  
you defy our explanations with your care.  
Spirit of purpose and possibility,  
you touch us when we least expect it and show us which way to turn.  
Receive our praise and prayer this day;  
and prepare us to receive your presence and promise  
in this hour of worship,  
Source, Word, and Spirit of Life, ever Three and ever One.

God of mercy,  
with the community of Christ's church gathered here and elsewhere,  
we confess that we have sinned against you in thought, word, and deed.  
We have not loved you with our whole hearts,  
nor have we cared for your world or respected our neighbours as we should.

In silence, we offer our personal confessions...  
(Hold silence for 30 seconds.)

Forgive us, we pray,  
and with your grace, remake us in the example of Christ, our Lord and friend.

**God assures us of his forgiveness:**

In Christ, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. God has made peace with us through the Cross of Jesus Christ. In Christ, all things hold together. Accept the peace of Christ and make peace with one another in his name.<sup>1</sup>

**In response to the gospel,  
we confess our faith and offer our lives and resources:**

*Please remember to prayerfully make your offerings to the congregation of which you are most associated. If you're a member/adherent of Knox-Moore or St. Andrew's, Mooretown, please send your offering to Howard McKellar or Judy Armstrong.*

**Hymn:** #346 (verse 1, 2, 3) "Jesus the Christ said, I am the bread"

**God speaks to us through his Word:**

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid.

## The True Vine

*God of wisdom, you have taught us that we do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from you. Send us your Holy Spirit to open our minds and hearts to receive your Word, speaking through the scriptures. Strengthen us to live that Word as our daily bread. Amen.*

READ ISAIAH 5:1-7; 27:2-5  
JOHN 15:1-17

1. Owing in large part to the climate, vineyards were once prevalent throughout the ancient near east. It is said that one of the first acts Noah did after the flood waters receded was to plant a vineyard. Throughout the Old Testament and into the New Testament, vines, vineyards, and wine are common references and symbols. Viticulture was central to Israel's economy. The land would be carefully prepared, choice stock would be planted and carefully tended, the young plants would be pruned to promote root and stem strength and ever-more abundant yields. The grapes would be harvested amid much celebration. Some would be dried, some eaten right away, and most would be pressed and fermented by the natural processes to create wine. Growing and tending a vineyard was a labour-intensive and long-term investment. Often vineyards would be tended by multiple generations of the same family. The vine, therefore, became a symbol of stability, prosperity, and thus, of peace.

The nation of Israel was called by the living yet unseen Lord God to be His representative body on earth. Their task was to bear witness to the existence, presence, grace, and the love of the God who spoke creation into being. Because of the prevalence of the vineyards and the associations with stability and prosperity, the vineyard and the vines became symbolic for the nation of Israel and its people.

The *fruitful* vine became symbolic of the nation's covenantal faithfulness:

The Lord God had prepared the land, planted the choicest seed stock – starting from Abraham, tended and protected the young shoots. When those vines clung to God, they produced abundant fruit of holiness, justice, and righteousness – qualities which encapsulate the love of God and reveal the living presence of the invisible God.

In contrast, a fruitless/wild vine became a metaphor for the consequence of covenantal *unfaithfulness*. When the people ignored God and God's policies religious, political, and economic disorder followed. The fruit which the vine thus produced, if any, was not representative of God, but rather of human desire and devices.

Taken another step, a trampled or uprooted or burning vine became a metaphor for the state of existence outside of all communion with God.

Against this background, Jesus portrayed himself as the *true* vine.

Just as he elsewhere described himself not as *a* shepherd, but the *good* shepherd, and not as simply bread, nor merely the manna that fed the Israelites in the desert, but the bread *of life for the world*; so here, he is not merely *a* vine, but the *true* vine.

Israel is the vineyard.

Individual citizens are the vines, the pleasant plantings.

Jesus of Nazareth is everything the vinegrower expects his vines to be.

He is the true vine.

**2.** This reading comes from the end of Jesus' farewell discourse.

He was preparing the first disciples to continue his ministry in his absence. He was soon to die on the cross, be absent from the disciples for three days while in the tomb, be resurrected, and, 40 days later, ascended. We, like the first disciples, live and minister without the physical presence of Jesus. In this reading, Jesus was preparing the disciples to go to their families, neighbours, governments, and even to the ends of the earth to proclaim the existence and mercy of God, to teach 'living by faith', and to heal all manner of illnesses and conditions in his name! He was preparing them for the work of revealing God and God's ways – of glorifying God.

Yet here he applied the brakes and gave a bit of a warning.

No matter how much we do, no matter how good our efforts seem, if we do them out of our own ability and motivation the consequence will be the glory of human effort: "We can end poverty!" "We can fix the world's food supply problems!" "We can establish world peace!" "We can raise kind, generous children!" "We can create order in our minds and homes!"

While we might see some success, such glory will not last.

The vineyard will become disordered and the vines fruitless.

**3.** It's worth noting that even though the goal of the passage is to encourage ministry and fruit production, the branch's role is a passive one:

*Jesus* chooses us to be the appendages  
of his fruit-producing system.

*Jesus* cleanses us.

*Jesus* is the means by which the Father  
grafts us into his vine.

The *Father* tends us so that ever-more fruit  
will be produced through our living.

The *Holy Spirit* flows from the vine  
into our hearts and minds  
through the words of Christ

bringing the love of God to bear on our thoughts, reactions, and  
actions.

The initiative is entirely God's.

The branch abides.

The branch abides in the vine.

The branch abides in his love.

The branch allows his word to abide in itself.

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*Jesus is the true vine who faithfully reveals the Father's love and the ways of the Father's vineyard.*

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Jesus is the one through whom the love of God permeates the world.

*Apart from him we can do nothing.*

**4.** Disciples are the branches. We are grafted into the vine by the grace of the vinegrower and nourished by the Spirit who keeps us connected with the vine through his words.

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*The degree to which our emotional reactions, our thoughts, our body language, our speech, and our actions reveal the love of the*

*Father; the degree to which our lives produce God-honouring fruit that lasts, depends entirely on the degree to which we receive the words of Christ and surrender to his love in all the highs and lows of our daily walk.*

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I've chosen the words 'receive' and 'surrender' carefully. I think they are the most tangible actions by which we can obey Christ's commandment to abide in him, abide in his love, and be inhabited by his words.

*Receive* the words of Christ as the Israelites received manna in the wilderness. Hear them, meditate on them, believe them, allow yourself to be shaped by them.

As the sheep receive the shepherd's words calling them by name, receive the Word of Christ calling you beloved, forgiven, chosen, and appointed.

*Receive*. And *surrender* to his love. Allow the Holy Spirit to draw you into communion with the Son in whom we have communion with the Father.

Every disciple has to learn to do this for themselves. I can't tell you what receiving and surrendering look like in your context. Except to say that prayerful listening to the Word of God in private or corporate worship is the primary means by which the Holy Spirit teaches us to accept such grace. As much as prayer rightly involves thanking God, praising God, petitioning God, and complaining to God, it also involves learning to hear the words of the Good Shepherd calling us 'beloved.' Thus, hearing the words, prayer is the means by which the Holy Spirit keeps us connected to the True Vine.

Jesus promises that as we learn in worshipful prayer to *receive* his words and *surrender* to his love, we will know the joy of Christ made complete in us.

Then our ministry will bear fruit that will last regardless of our present circumstances.

For the good of our souls, the health of the nations, and the glory of God,  
Amen.

## Hymn "Trust and obey"

### **We respond with prayer, faith, and service:**

God of all creation,  
the world is filled with your goodness and all nature sings in praise of you.  
We give you thanks for the stillness of night and the rest it brings,  
followed by day filled with energy and creativity.  
We give you thanks for summer which brings time to reflect and time to produce,  
periods of hard work as well as vacation days to regather our strength.  
Thank you for life unfolding with many blessings.  
We thank you, too, O God, for new lives born among us,  
for new opportunities emerging,  
for new insights and discoveries,  
and for new relationships.  
Help us embrace this newness after months of isolating,  
worrying and wondering what comes next.

You hold the future in your hands, O God,  
and we are grateful we can trust that you will walk with us in the days ahead.  
We pray for those who work on the seas and in the fields,  
providing for so many others.  
We know their work is uncertain in these times,  
and ask you to give them courage and strength to meet the challenges.  
We pray those who work in essential services,  
often at night or while others enjoy leisure.  
We know that their work keeps us safe and healthy,  
maintaining services and resources we depend on.  
Encourage them, O God, and give them all perseverance  
to meet the different challenges they face.

We pray for those who lead and those who form policy and keep order  
in this country and around the world.  
Make them alert to the temptations of their offices  
so that power is not abused  
and that justice is maintained fairly, without discrimination.

Gracious God,  
As we have received, free us to give.  
As we have been loved, open us to love others.  
As we have known peace, let us serve as peacemakers.  
As we have been freed, use us to work for freedom with justice for all.  
These are gifts of your reign taking shape among us,  
and so we pray as Jesus taught us, that your kingdom may come:

### **The Lord's Prayer**

**God sends us with His blessing:**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you.

Amen.