

EASTER 5

2/5/21

CAVES BEACH

CALL TO WORSHIP

Jesus is the true vine and God is the vine grower.

We are the branches.

It is God's Word that makes the branches strong;

and the Word bears fruit.

The Word gives rise to action;

and action proves our discipleship.

God celebrates when we act faithfully;

and we give back praise and glory, to God.

Opening Prayer God: seeing, knowing, experiencing

Where do we see you, O God?

We see you in the most helpless baby, as creator and caregiver.

When do we know you, O God?

We know you in the laughter and play of growing children, as the spirit of carefree joy.

How do we experience you, O God?

We experience you in mature men and women, as the renewer of confidence and strength for a new day.

In whom do we know you, O God?

**We know you in those of later years, as the provider of unforeseen opportunities and the eternal sign of hope.
Amen.**

HYMN 152 Joyful, joyful, we adore you

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMY3ivdNzwE>

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING & CONFESSION

Based on Psalm 22:25-31

Stand up and praise God before all the people gathered here, publicly revere God's name.

For the poor shall be hungry no more, they will eat and be satisfied,

all who seek God shall find God and their hearts will rejoice with songs everlasting joy.

The whole earth shall find their way back into right relationship with God and people of every nation shall join in these songs of praise

For God's realm brings everyone together, the proud and humble, all mortal beings will shall worship God.

Our children and all the generations yet unborn shall hear of the wonders and the miracles God has done for us and will gladly serve God.

God, you are the source of life and love,

the hand that provides all we need.

We confess that we can be disconnected from you

and cut ourselves off from your grace.

We have given priority to things that do not serve your vision of the world.

We have chosen the accumulation of wealth over generosity, and reputation and standing in society over speaking for justice,

We ask your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

We have forgotten that we are intimately connected to our community, that when we live selfishly and self-centredly we break links vital to the wellbeing of all the earth. We look at the world purely from our own viewpoint, exclude those not like ourselves and disengage from those with an alternate opinion, we create division and segregation that produces misunderstanding and conflict.

We ask your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

We have not loved ourselves well. We have forgotten that you have created us good and tried to alter our bodies and our personalities to a standard of dubious origins. Expand our thinking and remind us that our true identity is found in your love.

We ask your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

WORDS OF ASSURANCE

These are words of assurance to us:

God loves us in our brokenness, but we need not stay broken. When we are in right relationship with God, God's love is perfected in us and we are made whole.

READINGS

- 1 John 4:7-21

7 Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 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. 10 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. 11 Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

13 By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. 15 God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16 So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. 17 Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. 18 There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do

with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. 19 We love because he first loved us. 20 Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. 21 The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

- John 15:1-8

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

HYMN 229 Jesus loves me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LONkzLLNPmA>

SERMON

After all the heaviness of the service on ANZAC Day last week I think that it is fortunate that today we can concentrate on intimate love. Our intimate relationship with God is really love in action.

Our human condition is such that we crave some level of intimacy in our lives. It is wired into our makeup as a human being. We need to have loving relationships with mutual understanding to function fully as a human. The image of the branches of the grape vine weaving haphazardly together fits so well here. Love is part of who we were created to be, we are made to be woven together.

Brad Meltzer wrote a book called "The Inner Circle" in which he wrote: "There's nothing more intimate in life than simply being understood. And understanding someone else."

Experience shows us that intimacy is essential to a balanced life. As part of this balance we need to experience mutual understanding. Without intimacy

there is a profound emptiness in our life. We know that we all need to be understood in a personal way. Equally we all need someone to understand and to have some intimacy with.

When I talk like this we automatically think just in terms of the intimacy among humans. However as central as that is, it can also be shortsighted and leave our lives lacking something. There is an underlying need for something which is far deeper and all-consuming. This can only be discovered and experienced in our relationship with God.

At this deepest level it is a craving for the spiritual attachment reflected in the Garden of Eden where there was uninhibited connection between humanity and God. We naturally long for this spiritual connection. It is a primeval connection filled with purity and wonder.

As we seek this it can cause us to reflect on our own frailties and how easily we can mess things up in our own lives.

- How could we ever hope to attain that level of connection which was modelled in the Eden story? As,
- Is it possible to go back to that intimacy as we do not necessarily come before God without stains?

However that is not the way that it is. The message of the Gospel is that we are cleansed and reconnected with God so that we can be remade in order to allow that Garden of Eden experience. We are able to be fully restored allowing an intimate relationship with God.

The God in this experience is beyond words, much like God's description of Himself as He names Himself from the burning bush to Moses: "I am." Here Jesus opens it up for us by saying that: "I am the vine and you are the branches." Here we see the connection can be re-established through the vine Jesus connects us to.

This is a very gentle image for us to reflect on. Have you ever sat under the shade of a grape vine on a hot day, relaxing? It can be surreal and liberating.

Today we have the image of a grape vine growing in a vineyard, gradually maturing and twisting its branches together over the seasons. Annually the gardener comes along and prunes the branches so that they can produce more and more fruit. Looking at it from a distance it seems that the vines look picturesque and serene. But as we inspect the scene closer we can

see that the branches twist and intertwine to the point that one plant cannot be separated from another.

In this passage Jesus uses the humble vine as a metaphor for hope and the basis of restoration into intimacy with God.

The metaphor of the grapevine was not uncommon to the people listening to Jesus. It was often used by spiritual leaders and teachers. Examples can be found in philosophers from Palestine and Jewish thinkers and philosophers well before Jesus. There are many images of vines in the Old Testament which John's audience would also have been very familiar with.

Where this passage becomes unique is that previously the image had been told in such a way as to emphasise the failure of the Jewish people to bear the fruit required by God. It was an image of lost directions and failure to perform.

Jesus starts out with a completely different approach. "I am the true vine and My Father is the gardener." Rather than an image of failure it has been reinvented as an image of hope and comfort. In Jesus all the hopes and dreams of the old Jewish nation are now being fulfilled by God. No longer has that intimacy from the Garden of Eden been banished, it is now renewed and replenished. The intimacy long sought by the Jews has been reconnected through the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

This connection is now available to each and every one of us, regardless of how weak and frail we might seem. We so often get it wrong in our dealings with others and even the way we treat ourselves.

We can so easily get it wrong in our relationship with God. We are not always the people God calls us to be. However Jesus is the true vine and through Him we are invited into the right relationship with God. We are nourished and nurtured through this intimate connection. As Christians we are grafted to that life giving vine and it can help us grow to be the true version of the person God wants us to be.

We can enjoy the relationship with God that was always available to us. It is no longer up to me to get it right, or even you to get it right, as Jesus gets it right for us and through this we are grafted onto His vine.

We no longer need to strive endlessly to get intimacy with God. Jesus achieved that connection and we are welcomed into that connection as we connect through Jesus.

However we must be careful not to get too much rose tint on our glasses. Jesus is very honest in reminding us that there can be pain involved in the pruning. Jesus says that not every branch will bear fruit and the pruning is focused on assisting productive branches to give more and more fruit. There is no free ride.

I think that most of us will have had times when we might have felt God's strong pruning impacting on our lives. Even at those times we remained intimately connected with God, so that despite the pain we are not alone. The intimacy that we share with God runs far deeper than our emotions can comprehend.

Having established that there are fruits to be born, what are they?

I am sure that over the years you have been aware of many ideas being put forward. Some prefer to look towards the fruits of obedience. Others see these fruits as nourishing missional activities. Then there are those ideas associated with fruits of the Spirit and fruits of love.

In verse 7 we hear: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you". For our purposes this shows the main fruit coming through prayer. This comes through in the connection, or intimacy, that we have with God. As Christians we have the opportunity to be so connected with God that we know that our prayers are heard even when we don't use our voice. God is such that He seeks to fulfil our prayers where possible.

In verse 9 we come to see the reality of this intimate connection: "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love".

There are three verbs in this passage:

- Loved me,
- Loved you &
- Remain.

In the original Koinonia Greek these verbs are all in the tense that indicates completeness. From this we can discern that God's love for each of us is complete, nothing is being held back, love is already present. By this approach we are each connected to God and can feel free to give ourselves over to experience love and intimacy. As we do this we allow God to transform the way that we relate to others. In verse 12 we read: "My

command is this: Love one another as I have loved you". This then becomes the foundation on which we build our relationships with others.

This also shows us that our faith is based in intimacy, both with God and with one another. However as Christians we often fall into the trap of seeing God as being somewhat vague, relaxed and informal. We do need to avoid being complacent here.

In verse 15 we read: "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

We are friends with God – but God is not our friend. Rarely in Scripture is God described as being a friend of a person. In the Old Testament, Abraham is called a friend of God - but God is not called a friend of Abraham. Moses is called a friend of God - but God is not called a friend of Moses. In the New Testament, Lazarus is called a friend of Jesus - but Jesus is not called a friend of Lazarus. And here, we are called friends of God - but God is not called a friend of ours.

Our relationship with both God and Jesus is one of friendship but not between equals. There always has to be a healthy respect for our God. We need to ensure that our friendship does not lead us to believe that we are equals. God reaches out to us through the vine. We, as the branches, can be thankful for the nurture and sustenance offered.

Both Abraham and Moses were called friends by God. In each case God chose to relate to them in this way as he chose to reveal Himself to them. Similarly we read in verse 12: : "I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

The initiative for intimacy comes from God and is graciously given to us. In verse 16 Jesus tells us: "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you..." Our humble relationship with God is an act of grace freely given.

So this is a truly beautiful 'I Am' saying of Jesus as he invites us into an intimate relationship with the Father. He wants to abide in us as we abide in him. To be sure, that can sometimes be painful as we are pruned and made fit for purpose, as it were, but ultimately, God wants to share Himself with us and to call us his friends.

So, no matter where we are in our lives today, whether it is a good place or a hard place, God remains with each of us. This is an act of grace flowing through the living vine which Jesus has attached us to.

HYMN 670 Jesus puts this song into our hearts

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QC8rpIIAc4w>

PRAYERS FOR THE OFFERING

We place these gifts into the care of those who know where they may be best used to bring about the most fruitful of outcomes in the lives of all people and the world. We send them with our love. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Loving God, we name our concerns for our world, for we would be reminded of them and call them to our attention:

We pray for places where there is war and famine, where natural disasters have caused havoc, where people are displaced and struggle to provide a place of safety for their families and loved ones. Help us to respond to tragedy with appropriate love and care.

We pray for our nation, we know we are under pressure to take the view of those whose intention is to bring about friction and fragmentation, and make our difference, rather than our unity, what defines us as a community. Urge us to pay attention to what unites us and be those who bring healing and reconciliation.

We pray for our community. Help us to remember our interconnectedness, and to let motivation for our work and service to the world, be our connection to you. Encourage us to extend a welcome to all who walk into the life of this church. Encourage us to support and care for one another.

We pray for ourselves. When we feel broken, unlovable and unable to love, nurture us, and when we are fully alive and know the fullness of joy and love, celebrate with us.

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come,

your will be done,

on earth as in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins,

as we forgive those who sin against us.

Save us from the time of trial

and deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours

now and for ever. Amen.

HYMN 540 Christians lift your hearts and voices

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cg1ahsgeKq8>

COMMUNION

Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Lift up your hearts.

We lift them to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right that we should give our thanks and praise.

It is right to glorify you, Father,

and to give you thanks;

for you alone are God, living and true,

dwelling in light inaccessible

from before time and for ever.

Fountain of life and source of all goodness,

you made all things

and fill them with your blessing;
you created them to rejoice
in the splendour of your radiance.

And so we praise you
with the faithful of every time and place,
joining with choirs of angels and the whole creation
in the eternal hymn:

**Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,
heaven and earth are full of your glory.**

Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

Hosanna in the highest.

We acclaim you, holy Lord, glorious in power;
your mighty works reveal your wisdom and love.

You formed us in your own image,
giving the whole world into our care,
so that, in obedience to you, our Creator,
we might rule and serve all your creatures.

When our disobedience took us far from you,
you did not abandon us to the power of death.

In your mercy you came to our help,
so that in seeking you we might find you.

Again and again
you called us into covenant with you,

and through the prophets
you taught us to hope for salvation.
Father, you loved the world so much
that in the fullness of time
you sent your only Son to be our Saviour.
Incarnate by the Holy Spirit,
born of the Virgin Mary,
he lived as one of us, yet without sin.
To the poor he proclaimed the good news of salvation;
to prisoners, freedom;
to the sorrowful, joy.
To fulfil your purpose
he gave himself up to death
and, rising from the grave, destroyed death
and made the whole creation new.
And that we might live no longer for ourselves,
but for him who died and rose for us,
he sent the Holy Spirit,
his own first gift for those who believe,
to complete his work in the world,
and to bring to fulfilment the sanctification of all.
We bless you, Lord God, king of the universe,
through our Lord Jesus Christ,
who on the night of his betrayal

took bread,
gave you thanks,
broke it,
and gave it to his disciples, saying:
Take this and eat it.

This is my body given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same way, after supper,
he took the cup,
gave thanks,
and gave it to them, saying:

Drink from this, all of you.
This is my blood of the new covenant
poured out for you and for all people
for the forgiveness of sins.

Do this, whenever you drink it,
for the remembrance of me.

Father,
we now celebrate the memorial of your redemption.

Recalling Christ's death,
and descent among the dead,
proclaiming his resurrection
and ascension to your right hand,
awaiting his coming in glory;

and offering to you,
from the gifts you have given us,
this bread and this cup,
we praise you and we bless you.

Lord,

we pray that your in goodness and mercy
your Holy Spirit might descend on us,
and upon these gifts,
sanctify them and showing them
to be holy gifts for your holy people,
the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
the body and blood of your Son Jesus Christ.

Grant that all who share this bread and this cup
may become one body and one spirit,
a living sacrifice in Christ
to the praise of your name.

Through Christ, and with Christ, and in Christ,
all honour and glory are yours,
almighty God and Father,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
for ever and ever.

AMEN

DISTRIBUTION

PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION

We thank you, God our Creator,
that through word and sacrament
you have given us your Son
who is the true bread of heaven
and food of eternal life.
So strengthen us in your service
that our daily living may show our thanks;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

HYMN 531 Sent forth by God's blessing

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nt2aU6ItXt0&list=RDnt2aU6ItXt0&start_radio=1

BENEDICTION

Abide in us and sustain us, loving Spirit, let the union we have with you grow strong and resilient, for we leave here wanting to bear fruit – patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, love, joy, peace and hope. In your grace and goodness we go, ready to be your people in our world.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YhiG-Vj8CGU>