

Act of Worship at Home for Sunday 28 April 2024

Let us begin our act of worship with a prayer

To God, who is higher than our highest thoughts, yet closer than our closest friend, we give thanks and praise, glory and honour, this day and evermore.

Sovereign God, we come to worship you, setting aside these few moments to consecrate ourselves afresh to your service, to remind ourselves of your constant presence and to learn more of your love. Capture our imaginations, kindle our hearts, fill our whole being, so that we might come this and every day seeking new insights, learning new truths, experiencing new blessings and expecting new wonders. As we draw near to you, draw near to us we pray. **Amen**

Our hymn is number 443 in Singing the Faith: "Come, let us sing of a wonderful love"

1. Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,
tender and true;
out of the heart of the Father above,
streaming to me and to you:
wonderful love,
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

2. Jesus, the Saviour, this gospel to tell
joyfully came;
came with the helpless and hopeless to dwell,
sharing their sorrow and shame:
seeking the lost,
saving, redeeming at measureless cost.

3. Jesus is seeking the wanderers yet;
why do they roam?
Love only waits to forgive and forget;
home, weary wanderer, home!
Wonderful love
dwells in the heart of the Father above.

4. Come to my heart, O thou wonderful love;
come and abide,
lifting my life till it rises above
envy and falsehood and pride;
seeking to be
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.

Reading

Our gospel reading is from John 15 verses 1-8. Jesus says to his disciples: *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also 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.*

"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."

Reflection

When Rod and I bought our home in Anne Crescent, we inherited an old vine that was in a very poor state. Rod did some research and decided that the vine needed a drastic prune. The next year we had an abundance of juicy grapes! The advice from Iowa State University of Science and Technology is this: "If the vine is not pruned, the number of grape clusters would be excessive and the grapevine would be unable to ripen the crop or produce adequate vegetative growth. The purpose of pruning is to obtain maximum yields of high-quality grapes and to allow adequate vegetative growth for the following season." So, this is an ongoing process – prune hard and enjoy the results!

In this reading from John's Gospel, Jesus is telling us what spiritual well-being looks like and how it is achieved. We must abide in him and the result will be that we bear fruit. This passage is part

of the last conversation that Jesus has with the disciples before his crucifixion - he has washed their feet; Judas has gone to betray him to the authorities. Jesus spends his last few precious hours with them preparing them for what is to come. These words about Jesus being the vine and the disciples abiding in him like branches are all about caring for their spiritual health as they learn to live without Jesus being physically with them.

Apparently, the Greek word that is translated as 'abide' can also mean 'remain,' 'stay' or 'stand firm.' Jesus wants his disciples to stick with him, to keep following him even though he won't be there with them. They need to stay connected to him as a branch is connected to a vine. We all know that if you cut a branch off a living plant, the branch will quickly start to wither and eventually die completely. It won't be capable of producing fruit or sustaining life anymore. But equally, if you prune a vine, it will grow stronger and produce better fruit. Jesus said (in John 10 v 10):" I have come that they [meaning his sheep] may have life, and have it to the full."

God wants our faith to flourish, to develop and grow. We're designed, as our Gospel passage tells us today, to bear fruit. If we don't stay connected to Jesus, then our faith, like a cut-off branch, will quickly wilt and wither and there will be no fruit.

So, how can we abide in Jesus? Making Jesus a priority in our lives is vital to our spiritual health. How each of us goes about that will be different for each of us. But the important thing is making time and space to abide in Jesus and finding ways to maintain that.

Just as the activities that we each choose to help us stay mentally and physically well differ depending upon what brings us joy, equally how we go about keeping Jesus in the centre of our lives will depend on how we live our faith. Prayer, worship, reading Scripture, meditating on God, talking to fellow Christians are all ways that can help us care for our spiritual health. There's no set way for any of them to be undertaken either; the important thing is that, as we practise them, they help us to abide in the True Vine so that we too can bear fruit. **Amen**

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, thank you for the delicious fruits of the vine made possible by good soil, deep, spreading roots, careful pruning, sun and rain. Lord Jesus, our Vine, whose deep roots nourish us and from whose branches we receive comforting grace to love you, resolution to follow you and moral strength to serve you, please, we pray, prune off all the bad parts of our lives - our selfishness, ingratitude, and bitterness - so that we may live to serve you better, today and every day. **Amen**

Let us sing again, this time hymn number 242 in Singing the Faith: "A new commandment I give unto you"

A new commandment I give unto you:
that you love one another as I have loved you,
that you love one another as I have loved you.
By this will all know that you are my disciples,
If you have love for one another.
By this will all know that you are my disciples,
If you have love for one another.

And now a blessing: Let the grace of Christ redeem you, the power of Christ renew you, the example of Christ inspire you, and the love of Christ shine from you. Go in faith to walk his way and make him known to his glory. **Amen.**