

**Worship for 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter (complete text. A video version is also online)**  
**Keep safe. Keep caring. Keep praying.**

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*Welcome to this morning's worship. Thank you to Audrey Simpson for the New Testament reading, to Nigel Saxton for the Psalm; to Jemima Strain for the Word and hymn following her gospel message and to Sam McBratney for the pastoral letter and from me Gail Bullivant.*

THE PREPARATION

Call to worship

We come with joy to meet our Lord  
Forgiven, loved and free,  
A love that makes us one

With joy we meet our resurrected Lord  
His presence always near  
Remaining in God's love  
We see and praise him here.

Hymn: StF 43 – Come let us praise the Lord

- 1. Come, let us praise the Lord,  
with joy our God acclaim,  
his greatness tell abroad  
and bless his saving Name.  
Lift high your songs  
before his throne  
to whom alone  
all praise belongs.**
- 2. Our God of matchless worth,  
our King beyond compare,  
the deepest bounds of earth,  
the hills, are in his care.  
He all decrees,  
who by his hand  
prepared the land  
and formed the seas.**

- 3. In worship bow the knee,  
our glorious God confess;  
the great Creator, he,  
The Lord our righteousness.  
He reigns unseen;  
his flock he feed  
and gently leads  
in pastures green.**
- 4. Come, here his voice today,  
receive what love imparts;  
his holy will obey  
and harden not your hearts.  
His ways are best;  
and lead at last,  
all troubles past,  
to perfect rest.**

Timothy Dudley Smith (b1926)

Prayer of Adoration and Praise

Praise to the living God  
Praise to you God who sets hearts and minds  
soaring  
Soaring in wonder and praise at your majesty  
and grace.

Praise to the living God  
Praise to you God who set the universe in motion  
Whose earth turns and breathes and moves  
under your control

Praise to a redeeming God  
Redeemer God who watches and cares over all  
creation  
Redeemer God always offering a guiding hand to  
a troubled world

Praise to a loving God  
Praise to you God whose love is absolute  
A love that looks and offers the same amazing  
love to all

Praise to a forgiving God  
Praise to you God for the assurance of  
forgiveness to a sinful world  
A forgiveness that assures us of your love

God this morning we offer ourselves to you in  
praise and prayer  
We come supremely grateful that you are our  
God  
We offer you praise and adoration, now and  
eternally.

**Amen.**

Prayer of confession and declaration of  
forgiveness

Creator God you are always with us  
Yet sometimes we refuse to hear your guiding  
voice,  
Even though you are so near to us  
We fail to recognise you in our lives  
**Forgive us and change us**

Sustainer God, you carry us through life.  
Yet sometimes we do not recognise and  
Speak and witness to your guidance and comfort  
Even though it may encourage others  
**Lord forgive us and change us**

Redeemer God, we hear the cries of others  
Yet sometimes we do not listen  
We turn off, we live our comfortable lives  
We find distraction in worldly things  
**Lord forgive us and change us**

**Lord we thank you for the assurance of your  
forgiveness  
And that declaration that our sins are forgiven.  
We praise your holy name for this assurance.  
Amen.**

## THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Psalm 98 (NRSVA)

*Praise the Judge of the World*

- <sup>1</sup>O sing to the Lord a new song,  
for he has done marvellous things.  
His right hand and his holy arm  
have gained him victory.  
<sup>2</sup>The Lord has made known his victory;  
he has revealed his vindication in the sight of  
the nations.  
<sup>3</sup>He has remembered his steadfast love and  
faithfulness  
to the house of Israel.  
All the ends of the earth have seen  
the victory of our God.  
<sup>4</sup>Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth;  
break forth into joyous song and sing praises.  
<sup>5</sup>Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre,  
with the lyre and the sound of melody.  
<sup>6</sup>With trumpets and the sound of the horn  
make a joyful noise before the King, the Lord.  
<sup>7</sup>Let the sea roar, and all that fills it;  
the world and those who live in it.  
<sup>8</sup>Let the floods clap their hands;  
let the hills sing together for joy  
<sup>9</sup>at the presence of the Lord, for he is coming  
to judge the earth.  
He will judge the world with righteousness,  
and the peoples with equity.

Gospel John 15:1-17 (NRSVA)

*Jesus the True Vine*

- <sup>1</sup>I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-  
grower. <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. <sup>9</sup>As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

<sup>12</sup>'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. <sup>17</sup>I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Sermon

One of the areas I have total incompetency in is gardening. Occasionally I have a friend who buys me a plant for an occasion such as my birthday, or Samuel will bring home a sunflower that we are meant to grow at home. So far, not one of them has survived. With the exception that we have become experts at growing dandelions in

all the wrong places, which provides delicious food for our guinea pigs. So, I'm not convinced that I'm the best person to bring this metaphor to life.

Therefore, I'm starting at the end of the passage instead of the beginning and I'll use the illustration of small humans, that has at times been the all-consuming part of my life for the last 7ish years.

*'Remain in my love.'*

After the 3 trimesters of pregnancy, the baby is born and you enter the 4th trimester in which a new born has no sense of themselves as an individual. They identify themselves completely as their primary care giver. The two of them are one. They have no awareness that that the tiny hands and feet waving before them are their own. Or that their mothers eyes are not their own.

Psychologists explain that as an infant begins their understanding of self-awareness, they still understand themselves in the mirror of their parents' eyes, especially their mothers. What her eyes tell us about ourselves, we believe and become. It's a mirror game.

Prayer is much the same. As we receive and return the divine gaze.

In the first two or three years, we know ourselves in the security of those who hold us and gaze upon us. It's not heard, or seen. It's felt. That's original knowing.

*In my mothers' eyes I am beloved and secure.*

And yet separation happens, and I start to see myself through the eyes that compare, compete, judge and dismiss. The division has to happen. We can't stay there forever, letting our mother gaze at us.

*Being rooted, grounded and nurtured in love.*

*Remain in my love.*

The first part of this passage about vine and branches has always felt judgemental to me. Cutting out the sin and the places that I am not worthy. But have I understood it correctly?

After all I want to grow personally and produce fruit. And to produce the best fruit I need pruning. Am I in the place that I will allow myself to be pruned?

How can we surrender unless we believe there is someone trustworthy out there to surrender to?

How can we be pruned and therefore grow, unless we start with an awareness of the presence of God and an understanding that we are loved.

Prayer and presence become that mirrored place. As we receive and return the divine gaze of a God who loves us and has good plans for us.

Becoming aware of the presence of God.

As St Patrick said:

*God beneath you,  
God in front of you,  
God behind you,  
God above you,  
God within you.*

You cannot earn this. You cannot prove yourself worth of God. Feeling God's presence is simply a matter of awareness.

And there are these beautiful simple moments that we have, when we capture something of the love of God. Maybe in awe and wonder at the universe around us. Christians and non-Christians have experienced it. As they behold and gaze at something new.

*'Lost in wonder, love and praise.'*

I was listening to a podcast the other day and it said 'Pay attention to the things that fascinate you. Why are you drawn to it? What is it trying to say to me?'

*For if you can love, then you have known something of the presence of God.*

What if I don't always feel the presence of God? None of us are completely and fully present and aware of the presence of God. So don't feel guilty. We have moments where we have been aware of the presence of God and from that we are rooted.

*Do we allow ourselves to grow?*

Our Gospel is essentially about life, death and resurrection. To live, grow and transformation there needs to be life, death and resurrection. And the pruning moments can feel uncomfortable. But there has to be death for resurrection to occur. In the prologue of Richard Rohr's book 'Everything Belongs', he asks:

*'How do you talk about dying to a church that tries to appear perfect?'*

*'How do we talk about descent, when everything is about ascent?'*

*'How do we talk about letting- go in a capitalist culture?'*

How do you make the talk about pruning attractive when it isn't? How can we allow ourselves to be in a place of growth?

Jesus spoke to his disciples, calling them to take up their cross and follow him. They had to submit to the pruners knife, cutting away other goals and ambitions.

They have already borne fruit; they must now expect more pruning, so that they can bear more fruit.

*'You didn't choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.'*

From all of this comes humility of knowing who's in charge. Surrender.

It's a personal relationship of Love. To the one who loves us more than we know can begin to understand. The one who will tenderly love us and hold us through our growing pains, falls and mistakes. The one who prunes back that we might flourish.

How will we remain in God's love? Through Him we will live, grow and bear much fruit.

Amen

Hymn: StF 345 – And can it be

- 1. And can it be that I should gain  
an interest in the Saviour's blood?  
Died he for me, who caused his pain?  
For me, who him to death pursued?  
Amazing love! How can it be  
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?**
- 2. 'Tis mystery all: the Immortal dies!  
Who can explore his strange design?  
In vain the first-born seraph tries  
to sound the depths of love divine.  
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore,  
let angel minds enquire no more.**
- 3. He left his Father's throne above –  
so free, so infinite his grace –  
emptied himself of all but love,  
and bled for Adam's helpless race.  
'Tis mercy all, immense and free;  
for, O my God, it found out me!**
- 4. Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
fast bound in sin and nature's night;  
thine eye diffused a quickening ray –**

**I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,  
my chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.**

- 5. No condemnation now I dread;  
Jesus, and all in him, is min!  
Alive in him, my living Head,  
and clothed in righteousness divine,  
bold I approach the eternal throne,  
and claim the crown, through Christ, my  
own.**

Charles Wesley (1707 – 1788)

THE RESPONSE

Prayers of intercession

Lord Jesus Christ we bring these prayers to you in the knowledge that you know what is written on each of our hearts and understand the sufferings of this your World.

We pray for your Church throughout the World  
A Church striving to pass on the love of Jesus  
Christ

A Church striving to be heard within the clamour,  
noise and bustle of your World

As your church community and individuals help  
us and all your disciples

To have the knowledge, the voice, the strategy  
and revelation

To spread your gospel message

**Jesus said: "I am the true vine, and my Father is  
the vine-grower"**

Lord we live in a world that sometimes makes us  
stop in disbelief

Each day we read and watch scenes across the  
world of suffering, neglect

of governments and leaders, discrimination and  
poverty

Decisions and actions that are made by your  
creation, humankind

Your command is to love one another

Your command is to have care and compassion  
to one another

We ask that your love and your commands be  
heard throughout the world

The only love and commands that change people  
and change lives.

**Jesus said "If you keep my commandments you  
will abide in my love"**

We pray for all those who find themselves in  
darkness and sadness

People for whom joy is something far away from  
them

We pray for all facing the fear of illness and  
surgery

We ask that all who are suffering feel your  
healing touch.

**My command is this: Love one another as I have  
loved you.**

**Greater love has no-one than this, to lay down  
their lives for their friends.**

**We bring all our prayers to you through and in  
the name of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.  
Amen.**

Hymn: StF 471 – Lord I come to you

**1. Lord, I come to you,  
let my heart be changed, renewed,  
flowing from the grace  
that I found in you.  
And Lord, I've come to know  
the weaknesses I see in me  
will be stripped away  
by the power of your love.**

*Hold me close,  
let your love surround me;  
bring me near, draw me to your side.  
And as I wait,  
I'll rise up like the eagle,  
and I will soar with you,*

*your Spirit leads me on  
in the power of your love.*

**2. Lord, unveil my eyes,  
let me see you face to face,  
the knowledge of your love  
as you live in me.  
Lord, renew my mind,  
as you will unfolds in my life  
in living every day  
by the power of your love.**

*Hold me close,  
let your love surround me;  
bring me near, draw me to your side.  
And as I wait,  
I'll rise up like the eagle,  
and I will soar with you,  
your Spirit leads me on  
in the power of your love.*

Geoff Bullock (b 1956)

The Offering & prayer

Lord Father we bring our offerings before you  
In recognition that we are loved by you  
We bring them with glad and grateful hearts  
And ask that they be used to extend your  
Kingdom here on earth.

**Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

We say the Lord's prayer:

**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 trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen**

THE DISMISSAL

Hymn: StF 443 – Come let us sing of a wonderful love

- 1. Come, let us sing of a wonderful love,  
lender 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 y life, till it rises above  
envy and falsehood and pride;  
seeking to be  
lowly and humble, a learner of thee.**

Robert Walmsley (1831 – 1905)

Prayer & blessing

Friends remain in God's love and blessing  
Let his face shine upon you and give your peace

Say together:

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ  
And the love of God and the fellowship of the  
Holy Spirit  
Be with us all now and forevermore.  
Amen.**

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#### **StF 43 – Come let us praise the Lord**

Timothy Dudley Smith (b1926)

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Geoff Bullock (b1956)

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