

Vocations Sunday 2021 2nd May

Call

Praise God in his holy house of worship;
 praise him under the open skies;
Praise God in our homes,
 Praise him in our schools and on our streets, and at our work.
Praise him for his acts of power,
 praise him for his magnificent greatness;
Praise with a blast on the trumpet,
 praise with music through our headphones,
Praise him with big noises,
 praise him in quiet whispers.
Let every living, breathing creature praise GOD!
 Hallelujah!

StF 57 let all the world in every corner sing

Opening prayers

In the beginning,

God made everything
and saw that *it was good*

God of all,

We come before you today just as we are

We lift to you the joy of being alive

We praise you that we are part of your amazing Creation

Plant in us an ever-growing love for you

Let worship and praise burst from our hearts

Let the fruitfulness of our lives bring glory to you

Amen

Lord's Prayer

Intro talk:

In the Bible reading we will hear soon, Jesus talks about a Vine. This is a plant, which grows grapes. For a vine, or any plant to grow strong, and grow fruit, it needs to be well fed. Also, it sometimes needs its branches cutting shorter, this is called pruning because this helps the new branch that grows to have more fruit.

Jesus says in the reading that he is like a Vine and we are like the branches. In our Bibles the word used is to 'abide' with Jesus, this means to be connected, or plugged in.

If you think of a mobile phone with low battery, it needs to be plugged in to recharge. We need to be connected well with Jesus if we are to have the full power of God. Sometimes our phones' memory is full and we have to delete some Apps so that the phone can still work. If you've ever had to do this it is really hard to choose which Apps to delete and which are the really important ones to keep. This is a bit like pruning a plant. Similarly, as disciples of Jesus, sometimes we have to stop some of the things we do, so the really important things can happen.

Can you think of things you do that help you to stay plugged in to Jesus? What sort of things help you to be kind, and generous and loving?

Maybe make a list or draw the things that help you be like Jesus and be plugged in to Jesus. What things at school or work, at home and church help you to be loving and generous and kind?

Thinking about these things might make you feel thankful – that's good. Tell Jesus about that - it's a thank you prayer.

Can you think of things that fill your life but make it hard to do the right things?

What things at school or work, at home and church make it hard for you to be loving and generous and kind?

Maybe make a list, or draw those things too – it might make you sad, but that's ok. You can talk to Jesus about it - that's a sorry prayer.

John 15:1-9

Reflection

It is interesting that Jesus chooses imagery of the vine. In the Old Testament the vine is sometimes used as a symbol of the Messiah, a sign of hope, and sometimes it is used as a metaphor for Israel when the people have been found lacking in terms of their Godliness; when there is a need for change.

What we read in John chapter 15 is both hopeful whilst making clear that we need to change.

It is hopeful because we are reminded that we are interconnected with the Spirit of God through our relationship with Jesus. The words that spring to my mind are love, fruitfulness, joy, abundance, connection and abiding with. What words come to your mind when you think of being connected through the Holy Spirit, with Jesus?

What do you think it means to abide with Jesus? If I play a word association game I go from abide, to live with, then I think of home, then of rest, then of safety, to family, to friends and to love. To abide in Jesus is all of that and more; we are invited to abide in all that Jesus is. If

we are to abide in all that Jesus is, then we will be fully alive, we are nourished with the same life giving Spirit, we are loved, just as Jesus is loved by the Creator.

What do you think are the abundant fruits of a life lived like this? If we were to list them, they might be characteristics like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

Today is Vocations Sunday and I think a vocation that is nourished in the life giving Spirit of God would have fruit like this list – let's hear them again; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

However, words like calling and vocation can scare us sometimes, so I think of it like this: the primary call of a Christian is to follow Jesus, and the journey that emerges from that, for each of us, is our own unique vocation. Do you see your journey with Jesus as a vocation? Or do you think that are vocations are just for Ministers, and nurses and teachers?

There is a story about a student who loses in his room, the watch he inherited from his grandad; he cannot find it anywhere as the room is a mess. So he goes to his neighbour's room to look for it there, as it is easier to find things in a tidy room. His teacher passes by and asks him 'why are you looking for something where it is not?'

Do we sometimes look for a sense of vocation where it is not? The Bible reading today suggests that the abundant fruit will grow where we are most connected to The Vine. So on Vocations Sunday, I wonder, what happens if we look at where our life is bearing fruit and ask, 'could this be evidence of my vocation?'

Pause a minute and ask yourself: Where in life, at the moment, are signs of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control?

As mentioned earlier, this Bible reading also speaks some tough words about us needing to change, to be pruned.

It might be that things that were once bearing abundant fruit, that were once our vocation, are not anymore.

How do we know if some of our vocational branches are ready to be pruned?

Are there things you are doing, possibly in the name of God and church, that are actually now a burden, a chore, that bring a sense of gloom, and sadly either don't bear any fruit or the fruit is no longer abundant and juicy? If so, it might be time for change, time to have those branches pruned.

Vocations Sunday isn't just about you and me as individuals and our own vocations; it is also about the vocation of the church.

Where is the abundant fruit in the life of your church? And what needs to be pruned? As we emerge from lockdown, this is the time to ask, what is the vocation of the church in the time and the place we find ourselves? Is it the same as it was in 2019? Or has that which was fruitful now dried up? We possibly have some hard decisions to make as church communities.

My brother-in law lives on a vineyard in France, and when the tractors come to prune the vines it looks brutal, but it is necessary if the vine is to grow new and delicious fruit.

Our God is a God of love and a God of invitation. God waits patiently in our lives. As we work out our vocations, individually and as a community, God is waiting, but God isn't waiting like the vacuum packed grapes in the supermarket, waiting for us to open the packet and let the fruit out. God is waiting and is active. The invitation is to look, and to notice where God is at work, where there is evidence of the fruit of God's Spirit. That's where we join in.

Intercession

Abiding God,

We lift our world to you

Holding in our hearts places where

Lives are crushed by injustice

torn up by conflict

trampled by the greed of others

May justice germinate and righteousness ripen

That all may know your abundant love

Silence to lift to God our prayers for the world...

Re-root us in you

That your Kingdom may grow through us

Nurturing God

We pray for our communities

Holding in our hearts places where

isolation, has laid waste

deprivation has parched

dreams have withered

Flow afresh through these places

That all may know Your promise of fullness

Silence to lift to God our prayers for our communities ...

Re-root us in You

That Your Kingdom may grow through us

Life-giving God,

We pray for our Church

Where apathy diseases:

Plant in us a dis-ease with all that stifles Your Spirit

Where lack of vision is causing your people to perish:

Graft us to into Your limitless love

Where weariness withers:

Revive us with the Light of Jesus

Silence to lift to God our prayers for the Church...

Re root us in You

That Your Kingdom may grow through us

We pray for ourselves and the concerns of our hearts,

Lifting them in silence to you...

Prune us to be ready to respond to You

Re-wild us with Your ever-flowing grace

Graft us to You, that we may bear much fruit

Re-root us in You

That Your Kingdom may grow through us

Amen

Offering

Creator God, you made the plants and trees, the people and the animals. We want to say thank you for all of that and more, by sharing what we have with others. The money we give is a symbol of our thanks to you for all you have made and all that you are. Amen

StF 446 I will offer up my life

Blessing

May each tree you see this week be a reminder of the connection you have with the Creator of that tree. May each piece of fruit you eat be a reminder of the goodness of the Spirit of God nurturing you. Go in peace to bear fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Amen