

Bangor & Holyhead Methodist Circuit

Sunday Worship Sheet – Sunday 2nd May 2021 – Vocations Sunday

Our Worship for this week was written by John Hay, a Local Preachers and a member at St. John's, Bangor in conjunction with Alison Ransome, Connexional Vocations Advisor.
You may wish to have your Bible to hand.

Opening Prayer

Praise God in his holy house of worship; praise him under the open skies; praise God in our homes; praise him in our streets, our schools and our workplaces; praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his magnificent greatness; praise him with a blast of the trumpet; praise him with music through our headphones. Praise him with big noises; praise him in quiet whispers. **Amen.**

Hymn: StF.57. *Let all the world in every corner sing*

Let all the world in every corner sing:
My God and King!
The heavens are not too high,
His praise may thither fly;
the earth is not too low,
his praises there may grow.
Let all the world in every corner sing:
my God and King!

Let all the world in every corner sing:
My God and King!
The Church with psalms must shout,
no door can keep them out:
But above all, the heart
Must bear the longest part.
Let all the world in every corner sing:
My God and King!

George Herbert (1593-1633)

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Reading from the Psalms:

Psalm 150

Prayers of Adoration & Confession

Loving God we give you thanks and praise for the works of your creation in all its wonder and richness of diversity, a window for us to see who you are. Majestic, awe-inspiring, beyond understanding, the source of being. We wonder at you, as we wonder at your world. We especially give you praise and thanks for your son, Jesus. We wonder at how you revealed yourself in him and went through the agony of death on the cross that we can know you. We wonder also at the many talents and different characteristics that you have bestowed on each of us today through your Spirit, which lead to acts of amazing creativity and kindness. You have shown us how there can be such strength in both togetherness and diversity, just as there is within the Trinity. Forgive us then when we fail to use the gifts you have given us, when we deny those talents in others and prevent them becoming the people you intended, when we fail to work together with others to achieve your purposes. Help us to know the freedom of forgiveness and to be open channels of your love and grace to others. **Amen**

Read:  Psalm 150 again, this time out loud with rising gusto if you can!

Gospel Reading:

 John 15:1-8

Time to reflect: The Vine, a place to be pruned, abide and be fruitful

Let me start by saying that I am no gardener. I enjoy doing things in the garden, but I am mostly clueless. This is particularly evident when it comes to pruning and cutting back. I tend to pussy foot around and snip round the edges of my plants. Take my hedge. It is always untidy with a sort of Denis the Menace messy haircut look to it, in stark contrast to my next-door neighbour whose own hedge is a thing of beauty, shaped and manicured tightly.

I remember the first winter in my last house, when I was horrified by what the council workers did to the beautiful oak trees lining the Crescent where I lived. It looked devastated, like a nuclear bomb had gone off nearby. I nearly wrote in to complain. I needn't have worried, of course – they did know what they were doing and by the end of that summer the trees were back, only better, with more strength and shape from the new growth.

Pruning and cutting back is essential to the process of growth. Particularly to fruit bearing plants like the vine. Jesus knew it, hence the wonderful image of John 15 v1-8, which has much to say to us this Vocations Sunday.

In the Old Testament the vine is a symbol of Israel, but it is usually mentioned in the context of having been allowed to run wild, for example in Isaiah 5. Vines in the Middle East were (and still are) fast growing and if left unchecked would grow in all directions, with lots of branches, meaning that the fruit bearing branches produced lots of small, poor quality fruit. Quite simply, to produce a good crop, there needed to be regular ruthless pruning, particularly in its early years. Jesus says that he is the true vine, the true Israel if you like and he exhorts his disciples to abide in him, to allow God who is the gardener to prune back those useless and tangled branches, so that good fruit will be produced.

Many of us in the Church (and I include myself too) could learn from this.

We often try to cram too much in, meaning that we spend lots of our time going from one thing to another without time to reflect, pray or listen to what God is saying to us. Or just as significantly to fail have time for our families and friends. A life of service is all very well, but what when it just becomes a cheerless chore? What when it impacts on those closest to us? What sort of fruit is then produced? Where is the love in that?

There is a tendency to take on too many jobs, have too many roles and hats to wear and consider ourselves indispensable. Who else would do it, if not me we say? Well maybe we should just try stepping back for a moment. If you do have two roles, give up one and give your all to the remaining role. If asked to do something new, do it by all means, but first give up something else. Now, I am not necessarily the best person to invoke garden wisdom, but even I have noticed that when you create a space in the garden something else will soon grow there. Perhaps by hanging on to that extra role we miss out on the thing God is really calling us to do, in which we can find fulfilment and full potential. But more than that, we not only reduce the quality of the fruit we produce, but we may well also prevent others

exercising their calling and ministry by occupying a space in the garden where they might otherwise find growth.

On this Vocations Sunday, when we are asked to reflect on the part we play in the ministry of God's Church, we need to be asking first not what else does God want us to do, but rather what needs pruning in our lives. Only then will the Vine produce abundant, sweet fruit. Sometimes less is more.

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 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.

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

And if you find this message hard, no sour grapes, please!

Hymn: StF.258. *You are the Vine*

*You are the vine,
We are the branches,
keep us abiding in you.
You are the vine,
We are the branches,
keep us abiding in you*

Then we'll grow in your love,
And we'll go in your name,
That the world will surely know
That you have the power to heal and to save.

Refrain

Danny Daniels and Randy Rigby

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Prayers of Concern

Loving, Lord God, help each of us to abide in you and produce fruit, not any old fruit, but the best fruit we can. Prune us back, remove those areas of our lives that get in the way of each other and help us to concentrate on the things you have truly called us to do. Help us to realise the gifts you have given us and how best to use them for your Kingdom.

Loving, Lord God may your Church be a window to you, that the world may see your love for all people in action. Bring an end to bickering, nit-picking and in-fighting. Unite your Church, give it a voice to challenge injustice and act with kindness. Make it a safe space, where people can reach their potential and work together. Help it to grow in love and produce rich fruit in abundance.

Loving, Lord God, we bring our world and local communities to you. So much conflict, hurt and suffering. We think of those mourning loved ones, those who feel isolated and cut off from family and friends due to the pandemic, those who live in fear for whatever reason. Bring the fruit of healing and peace to their place of need and instill in us a desire to be the answer to that prayer today. **Amen.**

Let us say now the words of The Lord's Prayer in whatever language or version preferred.

Hymn: StF.660. *Called by Christ to be disciples*

Called by Christ to be disciples
every day in every place,
we are not to hide as hermits
but to spread the way of grace;
citizens of heaven's kingdom,
though this world is where we live,
as we serve a faithful master,
faithful service may we give.

Hard decisions may confront us,
urging us to compromise;
still obedience is our watchword –
make us strong and make us wise!
Secular is turned to sacred,
made a precious offering,
as our daily lives are fashioned
in submission to our King.

Richly varied are our pathways,
many callings we pursue:
may we use our gifts and talents
always, Lord, to honour you;
so in government or commerce,
college, hospice, farm or home,
whether volunteers or earning,
may we see your kingdom come.

Martin Leckebusch (*b.* 1962)
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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.

May the Lord bless you and make his face to shine upon you; may he water you with his love, that you grow in him and bless others with rich fruitful lives. **Amen.**

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO PASS ON THIS SERVICE SHEET VIA EMAIL, OR PERHAPS PRINT OFF A COPY AND PASS IT TO A FRIEND OR NEIGHBOUR WHO MAY APPRECIATE IT. THANK YOU.