

Rockway and First (North Pelham) Pastoral Charge
Sunday May 2, 2021

5th Sunday of Easter Worship at Home
Rev. Marian Raynard Phone: 905-892-4055

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Take a moment to quieten yourself, and to prepare for worship, bringing your heart and mind to this time with God. (you may light a candle for your time of worship)

Call to Worship:

Psalm 22

From you, God, comes my praise.

My promises I will keep before those who fear the Lord.

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord.

And all the families of the nations shall worship you. Let us worship God. Amen.

Opening Prayer of Adoration and Confession:

Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord, you are the vine, and we are the branches. Your love is our strength. Your energy is our joy. Your attentiveness is our hope. Your power can transform even the most difficult situations. You nourish our faith and imaginations so that we can bear fruit in many ways. You promise we can dwell in you because you are dwelling in us. We gather today to offer our praise to you, and bring glory to God the Father, through the gift of the Holy Spirit. Fill us with the love you know as God, ever Three and ever One, so that our love will honour you each and every day.

God, our Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, we confess there are so many ways we fail to love you fully. Forgive us for our lack of reverence for the earth and for using up more than our share of its resources. Forgive us for ignoring the cries of others who know pain or discrimination which we dismiss as mere complaint. Forgive us for seeking praise from others yet failing to encourage them in their endeavours. Forgive us, O God, and root our lives more deeply in your love.

In a time of silence we bring to you our faults and our failings. (Silence)

Lord, you hear our prayers.

And we respond using the words, that He taught us:

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 debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever. Amen.

Scripture Reading: John 15: 1 – 8 (NIV)

“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: “Cut off”

It's hard to believe that just over a week ago, our ground was covered in snow. While many were less than impressed with the weather, it did provide some much-needed moisture. The weather has swung between unseasonably warm, and cool weather, causing a restlessness as to dig in the garden and flowerbeds, set up the various outdoor spaces that have become a sanctuary. Others are busy germinating seeds (set up on the window sills in the house). The farmers will start the process of working the fields, fertilizing, tilling, planting, and the garden centers are busy as people want to get those plants ready to go as soon as it is warm enough – and a new season has begun. Those who have vines and fruit trees, have already been busy trimming and tying vines and assessing the overall health of their orchard or vineyard.

Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and my father is the gardener; he trims me up – he cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, and tends every branch that does bear fruit – trimming me up so that it will be more fruitful. I am the vine and you are the branches. If a person remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

This is an awesome image of what life in Christ can be like and when we dwell with Christ, and Christ is in us we will bear much fruit. We can be assured that while there will be times of trial, and uncertainty as to the season that is our life, there is grace in abiding in Christ. When we are tired out from our work or discouraged, often we feel like we haven't done enough for God. The image of Jesus as the vine and ourselves as branches reminds us that salvation and wholeness, yes even all the good things that we experience and produce, come not because of what we do, but because of what we are and where we are.

One year Mom and Dad set out the garden, there were the usual rows of potatoes, tomatoes, beets, peas, beans and corn. Mom had worked quite diligently to set out her cucumber plot. She had tended to the garden and things were looking pretty good. The garden was relatively weed free, the rain had come at the right time, and the garden had been tilled and all was looking quite promising. All of a sudden, she noticed a change in the cucumber plot. Some of the leaves were changing in colour and appeared to be dying, while others appeared to be healthy. She explored the cucumber patch and found the plant that appeared to be dying, the stalk was severed from the root and the plant was dying.

It is a common tale but one from which we can learn.

It reminds us that we die spiritually, that we cannot produce fruit when we are not attached to the vine, or when we are not connected to the roots which nourish us. It also reminds us that when we are attached that the fruit that we produce comes to us naturally, as a gift of God. The gardener does the work and the vine God plants carries the sap and all its nutrition to us, and we, because we are in the right place, prosper and produce for the world the fruit that it needs. All of us want to do good things, we want to produce good fruit, but many of us in trying to do good things, end up exhausted, and even despairing.

This particularly happens to many people in what is referred to as the “caring professions” (doctors, social workers, nurses etc.) But it also happens in the activities that we find ourselves volunteering to be involved with we give of our time and our talents, and wonder at the response to the work that we are doing when the good that we feel we are doing is being marred by the underlying current that is trying to pull us down the manipulation, the bullying, we get frustrated, angry and tired, and our ability to help others decreases and declines. For professionals they often give up on their career, for volunteers they often simply walk away from the organization.

Yet there are others who do as much if not more, others who are full of hope and of life, full of care and love for their neighbours and their world, who never fall pray to this plague, but rather go on, touching and healing those around them by what they do. I believe it is because they

are connected to the source of hope, to the source of life, to the source of care and love, for their neighbours and their world.

The cup of water to those who thirst, the word of assurance to those who are in doubt, the comforting hug to those who are in pain, the gift to those who do not know if they are loved, and the deed of kindness to the one who is in need, all these things are things that God wants us to do, they are part of what Jesus calls the fruit of being in him. They are also the evidence of the Christian life, proof that we are who we say that we are. It shows that we are saved, that we are already in a close relationship with God.

Fruit is the excess, the overflow of the life that a plant has taken into itself. The more life that a plant takes into itself the more life it produces. When there is an abundance of sunshine to fuel photosynthesis, and when there is enough water and the nutrients in the soil to be passed up the trunk and into the branches those branches thrive, grow, produce and grow again. The plant and its branches don't have to force themselves to grow, they don't have to make a resolution to bring forth sweeter and more succulent fruit, nor do they need to remind themselves to be more abundant in their production. They simply need to be in the right place. The place that the gardener has prepared for it. The place where the conditions for growth and fruit bearing are to be found. For us the right place to be is in the vine that has been planted by God and which is tended by God, the vine which we call Christ. As Christians, we profess that Jesus is our Lord and Saviour, and believe in our hearts that he rose from the dead are part of the vine of Christ. We are able to produce tremendous quantities of fruit, because God tends to us and cares for us. All we need to do to be faithful is remain a part of the vine, to perform the simple tasks that every branch performs, as a means of maintaining a fruitful life in the vine. The branch through its twigs and leaves, receives energy from the sun to fuel its growth. The leaves through photosynthesis converts light into plant energy and helps the plant produce fruit as its end result. The branch through its connections to the stem receives moisture and nutrients from the soil, the life-giving sap that makes it grow.

Like a branch that receives its energy from the sun through its leaves, when we unfold ourselves before God and accept from him the light that he offers us in his Word, we have to keep turning ourselves to the light of Christ – to continually be shaped by the teachings of Christ. By spending time with Christ each day (keeping his teachings in our minds and in our hearts) so that we might draw from them the strength and energy that we need. God's word gives us part of what we need for life. Psalm One says it very well: "Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and on whose law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither."

The branch is connected to the stem or trunk, receiving from it the nutrients and moisture that it needs. The branch is for want of a better word, in communion with the vine and through that communion it is able to produce fruit. The same truth applies to us. All the light in the world, all the reading of God's word and meditation upon the gospel of Jesus, will not avail us much unless we are connected to him. The connection is established by God; and maintained by us through the way of faith and prayer, the way of trust and worship, the way of willingness to receive from God by making ourselves available to God as part of Christ's living body, the church. These things both keep us in the vine and feed us – that we might produce fruit.

Jesus said "I am the true vine, and you are the branches". Jesus also said – "No branch can bear fruit by itself it must remain in the vine." We do this when we seek a relationship with God that goes beyond simply being part of the community of Christ. It takes work we follow the commandments that Jesus has given us to love one another and to love God as we would love

ourselves. That we would forgive one another those transgressions that need to be forgiven, and to trust God to forgive us when we are willing to be seen with the rest of the branches in the vine. When we pray to God, and when we listen to God for his answers, when we are willing to trust him even when we think that God maybe isn't doing just enough.

Our abiding in God, being part of the communion with God and God's church is how we are connected to the vine that feeds us, and when we are connected to the vine, it takes in our heart and our will. The heart that loves all things that God has made, and the will gives Him praise for them, the heart that aches for the sin of the world, and the will that tells the good news of Christ's love, the heart that believes that God alone makes the difference and the will that asks God to make a difference to oneself.

It is a matter of the heart and the will. A heart that trusts God, and the will that leads one to act as if every single one of God's promises can be counted on.

There is grace in the words of Jesus: "I am the vine, you are the branches. If you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit.

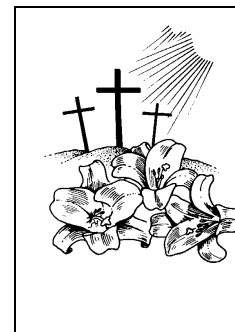
The next time you go out for a tour of the area, look at the trees and plants that are beginning their cycle of growth once again. God is a good gardener indeed he is a great gardener and what God plants and tends is tremendously fertile, tremendously productive. God has planted the Vine called Christ in our midst, and when we are willing, he grafts us into that vine, and provides to us all things needful for growth. All we have to do to remain a part of the vine and produce fruit pleasing to Him and good for us and our world is open ourselves up to the light of his word and commune with him through his Risen Son.

God gives to those who seek to be with him, and he gives only what is good and which helps us to be what he created us to be - a blessing to the world.

Let us pray: Praise be to you O God, our Gardener and our King. Amen.

Sung Response: "For the beauty of the earth" # 434

1. For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth over and around us lies,
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise.
2. For the beauty of each hour of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower, sun and moon and stars of light,
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise.
3. For each perfect gift of thine, to the earth so freely given,
graces human and divine, flowers of earth and buds of heaven,
Lord of all, to thee we raise this our sacrifice of praise.



Our Offerings:

You are able to make your offering by sending a **cheque or using the PAR** (pre-authorized remittance). For Rockway contact Bonnie Roland (905-685-3985), 213 Rykert Street, St. Catharines, ON L2S 2B5 and for North Pelham contact Janice Aulph (905-892-5244) or mail 602 Metler Rd, Fenwick L0S 1C0 or drop them in the mailbox.

Prayer of Dedication Let us pray:

God, we bless you for your gift of life renewed through Christ's love, and through springtime growth in fields and gardens. Bless the gifts we offer you. May they bring hope and renewal to others as we serve in the name of your greatest gift, Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord. Amen.

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING AND INTERCESSION

Lord Jesus Christ, we draw near to you in prayer this day, trusting that your love changes lives and your resurrection brings hope into the world God loves. You have drawn near to us and walk with us through every challenge. We are so grateful for signs of hope even in the midst of the pandemic, for vaccine distribution and recovery plans, for generosity and creativity offered in so many surprising corners. As we lay before you the concerns on our hearts today, draw near to those we name, and bring the gift that is needed.

We bring before you, those who are in the news headlines this week and situations in the world where justice and renewal are badly needed.

We bring before you, Lord, those who are in hospital or care and all those who struggle with illness, pain or health burdens of any sort.

We bring before you, Lord, families under stress, relationships that are strained, and friends and neighbours in need of reconciliation.

We bring before you, Lord, people seeking food, homes or jobs in these hard times, and those worried about economic recovery from the pandemic.

We bring before you, Lord, those who face discrimination daily, and who lack respect and opportunity because of their identity, or fear violence in their daily lives.

Lord Jesus, we believe that you hear our prayers and will be faithful to our requests and concerns. Help us seize the moments you give us to reach out to our neighbours and show them the love you have to share. In your precious name we pray. Amen.

CLOSING BLESSING

Go and tell the story of faith that is given to you by the One who never lets you go. Seek out those who are filled with sacred questions and be ready to answer a mystery with love. Amen.

Sung Response: Go Now in Peace

Go now in peace. Never be afraid. God will go with you each hour of every day.

Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true. Know He will guide you in all you do.

Go now in love, and show you believe. Reach out to others so all the world can see.

God will be there, watching from above. Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

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**We acknowledge that we meet on the traditional
territory of the Haudensaunee and Annishnaabee**

**With the provincial Stay at Home order,
Worship and activities have been suspended at both churches.**

Mission Moment – Empower Youth in Malawi

The people in Malawi's Mzimba District face many challenges. School dropout rates are high and teen pregnancy is on the rise. More women are experiencing gender-based violence, and there is a lack of knowledge about HIV transmission and prevention. To help address and educate the community about these issues, Presbyterian World Service & Development's local partner, Livingstonia Synod AIDS Programme, has trained 20 community facilitators to teach parents how to nurture adolescents. The facilitators help parents engage youth on issues such as sexual and reproductive health, teen pregnancy, early marriage and the transmission of HIV. The project has been successful in encouraging adolescents to return to school after dropping out.