

Parish of St. Thomas, Apostle & Martyr, Ipswich

2nd May 2021 - Easter 5

Collect:

Risen Christ, your wounds declare your love for the world and the wonder of your risen life: give us compassion and courage to risk ourselves for those we serve, to the glory of God the Father. **Amen.**

Psalm 22.25-end

25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever!

27 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

28 For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.



29 To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

30 Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord,

31 and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

A reading from the book of the Acts of the Apostles (8.26-end)

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Hear the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John (15.1-8)

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 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. 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. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples. **This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ.**

Reflection:

There are three main themes in our gospel reading this morning: fruitfulness; abiding; and dependence. Of those three, I think fruitfulness is probably the idea we're most familiar with. You've heard lots of sermons on the importance of bearing fruit, and explaining what that means or might look like. You may well be familiar with the list of the 'fruits of the Spirit' in Galatians 5 (love, joy, peace, patience and so on). So while an excellent question to ask yourself is 'am I producing fruit?' (and I invite you to spend some time reflecting on that), today I want to concentrate on the other two themes. Abiding, and dependence.

'Abide' is a beautiful word. It has a deep sense of being at home, of dwelling peacefully and steadfastly. It is close to the word 'bide' (bide your time), which means to wait. To abide feels rooted, sure, content. And it's a word that Jesus uses eight times in this short gospel passage.

To abide is something that Jesus wants us to do - to abide in him, to abide in God, to find our peace and rooted 'at home-ness' in him. But notice in the gospel reading that it isn't just Jesus telling us to abide in him. Instead it is a promise of a two way relationship. Not only are we to abide in God, but Jesus abides with and in us, as well. It is a two way thing, this deep sense of being at home, resting together. A mutual indwelling. You know that satisfied feeling of coming home after a long walk, or a trip away, and you take off your shoes, and relax into the sofa with a cup of tea? That sense of comfort and belonging underlies this sense of what it is to abide in God, and for God to abide within us! It's a beautiful relationship where we dwell together. 'Abide in me as I abide in you', says Jesus. That's the incredible level of intimacy that our faith gifts to us.

Following on from that, our next theme is dependence. Now, dependence is almost like a dirty word in our modern Western culture today. We hold up the ideal of being a self-sufficient individual, and assume that this is what everyone should at least be aiming for, if not actually managing to get there. Admitting that we might need help, or that we even value needing and giving support, doesn't really fit with how we think about ourselves, or the way our society works. But - spoiler alert - dependence is what faith is all about! Jesus wants us to be dependent. In fact, standing alone and being self-sufficient isn't even an option for us.

Perhaps this sounds terrible to you, and that's not surprising. We imagine that dependence means we are weak, or that we have somehow failed. I imagine most of us would think of the perfect life as one where we can do things for ourselves, and don't have to rely on anyone else. But this dependence Jesus is talking about is life-giving, nourishing, leaning on the strength and groundedness of God. In Jesus' analogy of him as the vine and us as the branches, we would wither and die if we tried to stand alone. Branches *need* to be attached to the main plant. To have faith, to rely on God, is to admit that we can't do things on our own. So, Jesus teaches us to have that relationship where we abide in God, and God abides in us, a relationship where we depend on God in an honest and vulnerable way. Branches don't bear fruit without being part of the whole plant. The sustenance and energy is given by the vine, and only through every part working together can a plant produce any fruit at all. In the same way, if we tried to live independently of God, we would quickly find that the fruits of the Spirit were in very short supply!

If we even take this one step further, we realise that it doesn't stop there. For a plant to flourish, or for a Christian to experience life in all its fullness, we realise that the branches need each other too, as part of the same plant. We need each other. We are dependent on each other. 'Oh no', you think. 'I don't mind depending on God, but I don't want to depend on anyone at church'.

Probably many of us feel this way. We are reticent of admitting when we struggle, we don't want people to know that anything is hard for us. But dependence is not a dirty word. Dependence is a gift from God. It allows us to let go of trying so hard to do everything by ourselves. It frees us from the struggle of trying to be enough, trying to be perfect, trying to always be fine. Dependence allows us to say, 'I need support, I need prayer, I need to find rest'. Accepting that we depend on God and each other gives us permission to lean on each other whenever we need to, and each one of us knowing that we are all interconnected, interdependent, all drawing our strength from God.

So we find that our three themes are actually all connected. Abiding, dependence, and fruitfulness. That beautiful relationship of abiding, of us and God being at home within each other, means that we don't have to try to 'go it alone' in our spiritual lives. By depending on God, by abiding in God's love and grace, we are able to flourish in beautiful relationship together. And if we can do that, we will find that the Spirit is at work among us, that we are filled with an outpouring of the fruits of the Spirit.

"Abide in me as I abide in you. My Father is glorified by this".

- Rev Cat

The risen Christ came and stood among his disciples and said, 'Peace be with you.' Then were they glad when they saw the Lord. Alleluia.

The peace of the Lord be always with you.

I, the Lord of sea and sky
I have heard my people cry
All who dwell in dark and sin
My hand will save
I, who made the stars of night
I will make their darkness bright
Who will bear my light to them?
Whom shall I send?

*Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord?
I have heard you calling in the night
I will go, Lord, if you lead me
I will hold your people in my heart*

I, the Lord of snow and rain
I have borne my people's pain
I have wept for love of them
They turn away
I will break their hearts of stone
Give them hearts for love alone
Who will speak my word to them
Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord...

I, the Lord of wind and flame
I will tend the poor and lame
I will set a feast for them
My hand will save
Finest bread I will provide
'Til their hearts be satisfied
I will give my life to them
Whom shall I send?
Here I am, Lord...

Scriptures for our new priest:

We are hoping for a priest who can aspire to Philippians 2, and offer joy and humility in serving the Lord at St Thomas. To lift up holy hands in prayer (1 Timothy 2: 8) - and to keep hold of the deep truths of the faith (1 Timothy 3:9).

A prayer for Easter

Your love,
which breathed this world into being,
established a covenant people,
brought them out of captivity
and into a promised land.
Hallelujah!
Your love,
which from the moment of our birth
has known and called us by name
from out of this world's slavery
into the kingdom of God.
Hallelujah!
Your love,
poured into the heart of Jesus
who endured the nails of our sin,
defeated death to rise again
and causes our hearts to sing
Hallelujah!

Please pray for:

All who are affected by the Coronavirus: *For all who have lost their jobs; all who are despairing and living with loss or anxiety. For hospital and health care workers.*

Those with chronic or long-term illness: Rosemary, Eric Dickerson, Jenny, Andrew Barfield, Kathy Steele, Andrew, Peggy, Margaret Christian, Natacha, Katie, Rex & Jill, Christine, Stephen, Samantha, Theresa

Those undergoing treatment or currently ill: Gloria Elmer, Leslie Bloomfield, Roger Dickerson, Vicky & Matt, Dagmar, Roy, Kenneth Leek, Angela, Helen Pratt

Those who have recently died, and their families mourning their loss: Prince Philip. RIP

Prayer for our new Priest-in-Charge:

Lord, give us all wisdom and guidance as the search process goes ahead. We know that you have plans for us as a church - and we trust you. We pray that the right person will be drawn to us, that your Spirit will be at work.

Grant us a vision, Lord, to see what we can achieve, to reach out beyond ourselves, to stretch our capabilities, to increase our sense of purpose, to be sensitive to your presence at all times and listen to your call.

Amen.

Notices:

Faith Pictures: a 6 week course on Zoom starting on Weds 5th May. A great informal space to practice talking about faith with others. Speak to Malcolm to sign up.

APCM: our APCM is **next week** after the morning service. You will be able to join via Zoom if you aren't at church in person.

New Vicar Search: Please keep all involved in the interview process in your prayers.

Baby Bank: the Suffolk baby bank we are hosting in the community room would welcome donations of tinned potatoes, instant mash, and dried/long-life milk.

Lectio 365: an app to help you read the bible and pray! This is a free app which gives you short prayers and reflections, perfect for starting and/or ending your day with. Recommended by Rev Jackie.

Like a Chat?: a reminder that there are several people who are available for a phone call (see numbers listed in the pink box below). We don't have to wait to be called by someone else, do pick up the phone and ring someone if you'd like conversation, prayer, or just a friendly voice to say hello.

Booking for in-person services: Sunday services must be booked into. Online booking forms are sent out via email. **To book by phone, call 01473 742973 and leave a message saying which service/s you are booking for, your name, and how many (including yourself) you are booking for.**

Pray for members of the St Thomas Congregation

Brian & Jackie Sears; Jim & Daphne Startup; Julie & Mark Stevens; Rosemary Suggate; Shirley Vivian; Angela Waldridge; Brian & Joy Ward; Audrey West



This Week:

Sunday 2nd May

10am: Eucharist with facebook livestream

Monday 3rd May

11.30-1.30: Church open for prayer

Wednesday 5th May

10am: Eucharist

Thursday 6th May

11.30-1.30: Church open for prayer

Sunday 9th May

10am: Eucharist with facebook livestream



6th: Daniel Fisk
Rebekah Bloomfield

Contacts:

Acting Priest-in-charge: Revd Cat Connolly

m: 07530 412988

Email: revcatconnolly@gmail.com

Cat's day off: Mondays

Lay Evangelist: Malcolm Gibbs m:07906 663530

Director of Music: Simon Clark BA (Hons) FLCM ARCO

m: 07961 859344 Email: sussexsi@aol.com

Church wardens: Roger Elmer m:07810 274586

Stephen Marginson 01473 258791

If you would like to chat, you could also ring:

Mary Bullass 625135 Gloria Elmer 745590

Rev Jackie 07962 172639

Revd Pat 464748

Rev Canon Chris 462109

Church website:

<http://stthomasipswich.org.uk/>

Sunday Worship & other Worship resources on the Church Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/stthomasipswich/>