

# Home Worship May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

## Easter 5

### Centering Ourselves for Worship

As we prepare now to worship together while apart, I invite you to take three slow, deep breaths and allow your space to become worship space for this time. [*brief silence*]



### Lighting of Candle

Into our presence we invite the fire that has burned since the beginning of time, that it might shine for us this day.

### Opening Music

The Spring Has Come

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6gvgDE2YLk>

*Murray/Gibson from Etobicoke United church - you can if you feel technologically up to it fast forward the first minute or so where he's introducing it. Not the most visually exciting setting but I wanted these words and they are hard to come by*

### Prayer

Loving God, Source of all Life, you are the vine-grower and we are the branches.

Wetrust ourselves to your wise and tender care.

Work with us, we pray,

That we may bear the fruit that is in us,

That we may be all that we are meant to be.

May we receive and share your nourishment,

Finding strength and compassion to love each other as you love us.

Amen.

## **Readings from Ancient and Modern Wisdom**

read by Frank Loomer

### **John 4:16-21**

We have come to know and to believe  
In the love God has for us.  
God is love,  
And those who abide in love  
Abide in God  
and God in them.

Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as God is, so are we in this world.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.

We love because God first loved us.

Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

The commandment we have from God is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

### **John 15:1-8**

'I am the true vine, and my Abba is the vine-grower.  
Who cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit  
But prunes the fruitful ones  
To increase their yield.  
You've been pruned already,  
Thanks to the word that I have spoken to you.  
Live on in me  
As I do in you.  
Just as a branch cannot bear fruit of itself,  
Apart from the vine,  
Neither can you bear fruit apart from me.  
I am the vine;  
You are the branches.  
Those who live in me and I in them  
Will bear abundant fruit,  
For apart from me you can do nothing.  
Those who don't live in me  
Are like withered, rejected branches,  
To be picked up and thrown on the fire and burned.  
My Abba will be glorified  
If you bear much fruit  
And thus prove to be my disciples.

## **Poem by Mary Oliver**

## When I am Among the Trees

Mary Oliver from *Thirst*. Boston; Beacon, 2006

When I am among the trees,  
especially the willows and the honey locust,  
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,  
they give off such hints of gladness,  
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,  
in which I have goodness, and discernment,  
and never hurry through the world,  
but walk slowly and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves  
and call out, "Stay awhile."  
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, "It's simple," they say,  
"and you too have come  
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled  
with light, and to shine."

## **Special Music**

**"All Things Bright and Beautiful "**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pVSf5QISmA8>

*John Rutter setting - National Taiwan University Chorus*

## **Reflection**

### **Branches of the one vine**

### **I cannot be well if you are not well.**

We feel this don't we.

And never so much as in these last days and weeks and months.

Our wellness does depend on what others do or don't do.

Others' wellness depends on what we do.

And of course environmentalists could expand on this-

Back to Rachel Carson, in *Silent Spring*, reminding humans that if we try to fix one thing, such as pest control, we have to think what our fixes are doing to the whole ecosystem.

And as we ponder rising tides and clearcut forests, we know the ecosystem affects us.

And emotionally, spiritually we know it-

We know how losses and emergencies and tragedies even from across the world can bring tears to our eyes.

Maybe as the Buddhists would say, rather than beings

We are Interbeing,

Interdependent with all that is, in an interdependent world.

Yes, if others are not well, if the world is not well, we are not well either.

And these days we may all be picking up on the loneliness, the anxiety, the grief and weariness outside of us as well as inside us.

## **The deeper wisdom of Vine, Vinedresser and Branches**

People were lonely, anxious, weary, adrift, and more back then too,  
When Jesus was gone from his circle of friends,  
And many of those friends were gone too

Long after Jesus' earthly ministry, the writer of the Gospel of John distilled what he could of what Jesus lived and thought,  
Searching out its deeper meaning in wisdom words for those coming after.

Then , as now, there was much to divide and disconnect and isolate people,  
But the wisdom of Jesus is a way that connects,  
The way of a vine with many branches, tended by a loving vine keeper.  
The branches need to stay connected to the vine in order to live,  
And they need the care of the vine keeper.

Jesus told many stories about vines and vineyards, we know that,  
And the prophets did before him-  
In a landscape full of vines and branches, it was an evocative way to speak of human connectedness with each other and with the Divine.  
And vines and trees and branches show up often in the words of biblical prophets,  
Expressing the human condition and the human relationship to the divine.

I wouldn't get too hung up on the pruning in today's Gospel.  
Humans can get into trouble with this  
If we start thinking who might be the bad branches and leaves, the ones to be thrown into a bonfire, or bagged for garbage collection.  
And I've known too many people who wonder if they themselves are the bad branches, the garbage,  
Often because other people told them they were,  
Or did not tell them and show them they were beloved.  
And the church- sadly- has got carried away with pruning at times  
When they pronounced on who was in and who was out,  
And at times did irreparable harm.

The writer of John was just a human, and he got some things wrong - he had prejudices which we don't and shouldn't carry forward.  
We at Wesley and St James are not here to decide who's a good branch and who's a bad branch- we are here to help everyone thrive as God's beloved.

## **Going deeper with the image of divine Vinekeeper.**

I see a Being, a Presence who loves the vine,

Vines, vineyards, gardens- they are all labours of love , aren't they?  
They don't thrive without love.

The biblical prophets point to a divine Vinedresser who suffers, who is emotionally distraught when the vine doesn't do well.  
The prophet Jeremiah speaks of a divine Vinedresser, who planted the people as a beautiful vine but it's gone wild. {*Jeremiah 2:21*}

The prophet Isaiah sings a love-song to God's vineyard - set on a fertile hill, lovingly dug and cleaned and tended, and it's not thriving at all either, the grass are wild. *{Isaiah 5:1-7}*  
This divine Vinedresser gets very discouraged, to put it mildly.

But over all, the Bible tells us of a Holy One, a Divine Presence who or which doesn't leave us,  
Doesn't throw us away,  
Doesn't consign us or anyone to the scrapheap.  
The same divine Presence that has touched our hearts and given us courage.

So the Vinekeeper in the end loves the vine and wants it all to do well.  
And we, created in the Divine Image, get to help with this,  
As we tend community,  
The whole web of creation.

In this our work is to honour each branch as if it were a branch of Jesus,  
As if it contained the image and likeness of the Divine,  
And so it needs care and respect,  
Just as you do,  
Just as each one of us does.  
For if something goes wrong with even one branch, we all suffer-  
And if that branch thrives, then we all thrive.

### **That's where the love commandment comes in.**

I read the teaching on the vine through the lens of Love,  
As St Augustine of Hippo recommended we always do when we read the Bible.  
The Love message comes through in the letters attributed to John- and even where judgement is mentioned, as today, the overriding message is: there is no fear in Love- ground yourself in Love.

In our scriptures it was never enough to say one loved God or to go to worship or say what you believed,  
It was always about how you live it in love of neighbour,  
And it was a practical love-  
Full of acts of kindness and deeds of service.  
The Jewish law and prophets teach us that.  
Jesus showed it forth in his kindness and service to the poor, the foreigner, the widow, the small child, the ill, the outcast.  
That's how you love neighbour and that's how you love God.

### **And the beauty of the vine image is:**

Not one of us can care for everyone who needs care- we would be overwhelmed before we began-  
And many among us are already weary with caring and serving,  
And need rest.

That's why we need to be a vine and branch community,  
All working together in our deeds of loving service, our mending of the world, our holding each other  
and all in need in prayer, our compassionate listening,, our acts of generosity, our kind words.

Consider the trees,  
Who rely on each other in ways we never imagined,

So that if we damage the forest , the remaining trees suffer and are bereft-  
But , we are told, they send each other messages, they do what they can to keep each other alive,  
And their roots give them a hidden strength- a strength we also have as we draw from the divine  
source.

And as we ponder them and other growing things in this wondrous season,  
May their light flow to us, and may we , like Mary Oliver, hear their wisdom: “It’s simple,” they say,  
“and you too have come  
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled  
with light, and to shine.”  
Together, you and I and so many more living beings,  
Here we are to do just that.  
Amen.

### **Music for Reflection**

Here I Am

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPg0V7M1J9g>

*Dolly Parton*

### **Offering Prayer**

**Generous God, you give us gifts beyond our understanding. We offer you our gifts, trusting that that your Spirit will work with them and through them. Through our gifts and through our offering of ourselves, may new and vibrant growth happen in our church and around the world, nourished by the living water of your Spirit. Amen.**

### **The Community at Prayer**

Vine-keeper of the true vine, we seek to grow into the people we are meant to be,  
we seek to grow as the spiritual community we are meant to be.

We seek the comfort of your Spirit as we grow and deepen in our prayer life, as we find the strength  
to live through change and challenge and adversity.

May we reach out in love and caring to each other, and to your beloved world,  
offering light and love in your name.

We pray for places of war, conflict and unrest, places marred by humanity’s inhumanity.

We pray for places where civility and compassion are in short supply.

We pray for those suffering from COVID and their loved ones, and all who are burdened with  
loneliness and anxiety-

We pray for those in India in these days, and those in Israel, and many more.

And we seek the light and warmth of your healing Spirit for those places and for our own church and  
community, and for those known to us who need our prayers.

In a moment of silence...we hold them in Love and Light.

These and all our prayers we gather into the words we share as beloved community with those  
around the world and across the ages: Our Father [or Creator ] etc.

## **Announcements, Joys and Concerns**

**Board meeting this Wednesday. 7 p.m. Facebook live Thursday at 7 on Jane's FB page.  
Zoom coffee break Fri. Starting 10, same zoom link as today.**

## **Closing Music**

**La Bamba**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k5dkwQY-tk>

*Playing for Change - simply a lovely celebration and expression of community around the world!  
May it bring joy to your heart!*

## **Blessing and Sending Forth**

May you stay rooted and grounded in the perfect love that casts out fear. May you be nourished by God's own light and warmth.. May the love, light and warmth within you help you grow into all that you are meant to become. Love one another and nourish good growth here and throughout God's beloved world. Amen.

## **Sharing the Light**

And as we go forward into our day, we carry with us that fire that continues to burn and will continue to create new life. May it inspire us and warm us as we go.

*Centring words by Susan Lukey from Gathering L/E/P 2021..  
Candle lighting and sharing the Light by Ali Anningson. Other Prayers by Jane*

## **Dedication**

