

The United Benefice of St John the Baptist, Shedfield and St Nicholas, Wickham  
**Being Church Together – At Church and At Home**

Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2021: Easter 5

'I am the true vine... abide in me'



*At church or at home, we're being church, together*



*Welcome... to Being Church at Home on the fifth Sunday after Easter. Traditionally, today is the Rogation Sunday, the day when farming communities would ask for God's blessing [rogare is the Latin verb, 'to ask'] on the newly-sown crops on which their livelihood depended. In medieval times it was the day on which to*

*'beat the bounds' of the parish. Civic bounds were marked out and committed to memory (important in the days before OS maps!) by a procession around the boundary and – alarmingly to our ears – the beating of boys to ensure they stayed at the various boundary stones and markers en route.*

*So how does this traditional festival with its emphasis on the blessing of crops and justice in maintaining boundaries translate for today? Rogation Sunday/Easter 5 is a good opportunity to start afresh; perhaps to walk around your neighbourhood praying for the people who live there as you go; and as a reminder that Christian Aid Week begins on 10<sup>th</sup> May, with its emphasis on hope and justice.*

*Remembering Rogation Sunday keeps us connected with our roots. In today's Gospel, Jesus says that he is 'the true vine', and that's the theme of our worship this morning. His Father is the vine-grower who removes fruitless branches and prunes those that remain so that they will produce even more. Like the disciples who first heard this parable, we are the branches; we're part of the same vine and grow and bear good fruit together.*

*How do we 'abide' – remain – in Jesus? How do we stay connected to him? What does that mean in practice?*

The coronavirus crisis has made it necessary for the Church of England to suspend all public acts of worship. The ministry team has created this short act of worship for you to use at home, in the anticipation that it will help you to spend a few moments quietly with God and encourage us all to know that we are sharing this service with each other. Perhaps you could find a quiet and comfortable place in which to worship, and light a candle as a focus for prayer and reflection?

### **Call to worship**

Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Lord, we offer this time to you,  
 away from our busy-ness  
 and ready to re-connect with one another and to you,  
 at church and at home;  
 ready to rest in you and grow in you;  
 ready to grow closer, grow deeper;  
 ready to listen to your word  
 and to meet you in prayer and praise, in sound and in silence;  
 ready to learn and grow as your faithful disciples;  
 ready to grow and be fruitful.  
 Lord we offer this time to you.  
 Amen.

### **Hymn: I, the Lord of sea and sky**

*Voted the UK's tenth most popular hymn in 2019, 'I, the Lord of sea and sky' draws on Isaiah 6.8 and has an unusual change of focus between the verse and chorus. The verses speak from the perspective of God, whilst the chorus, although it's still in the first person, is from our own perspective as the singers of the hymn offering our lives to God. As well, each verse reflects a paradox, because the powerful God who created 'sea and sky', 'snow and rain' and 'wind and flame' is also the God who hears his 'people cry', bears his 'people's pain' and 'tend[s] the poor and lame.' And quite apart from the challenging/comforting words, it's a gloriously singable tune!*

Read/pray the words, or join in here:

[I, THE LORD OF SEA AND SKY - YouTube](#)

1 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.*

2 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.  
 I will speak my word 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.*

3 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. 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.*

Words: D Schutte (b. 1947), based on Isaiah 6 Tune: HERE I AM

### **We pray together and ask for forgiveness**

*Jesus said, 'A new commandment I give unto you: that you love one another as I have loved you.'*

Lord, we come to you aware of our failings and conscious that we have tried to live in our own strength. We have resisted the challenge of change and not trusted your truth (*take a moment to remember those times...*).

*Father, forgive us.*

We have become rooted in ourselves and not in your word (*take a moment to remember those times...*).

*Father, forgive us.*

We have looked for quick fixes and not kingdom-shaped growth (*take a moment to remember those times...*).

*Father, forgive us.*



*Vine mosaic, Holy Land 2015*

*In church, members of St John the Baptist choir will sing 'A new commandment I give unto you' as part of these prayers of forgiveness. You might choose to spend some reflective time listening to a virtual choir singing the same hymn: [A New Commandment I Give Unto You - YouTube](#)*

Lord,  
 we thank you that when our faith becomes straggly,  
 you prune it with your wisdom;  
 when it becomes malnourished,  
 you nurture it with your grace;  
 when it becomes brittle,  
 you strengthen it with your truth;  
 when it becomes barren,  
 you restore it with your life-giving energy, forgiveness and love.  
 Amen.

### **A Collect for the fifth Sunday of Easter**

God of love and Creator of us all,  
 you promise to be with us always.  
 Teach us to honour you  
 in worship, prayer and praise  
 and in lives rooted in your life;

entwined in your life;  
 and made fruitful in and through your life with us.  
 Live in us and with us,  
 that we may truly glorify your name  
 in your church and in your world.  
 Amen.

### **The Gospel reading for Easter 5: John 15.1–8**

*In his parable of the true vine, Jesus draws on Isaiah's 'Song of the unfruitful vineyard' (Isaiah 5), in which God's planting symbolises 'the house of Israel and the people of Judah': '...My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with choice vines; he built a watch-tower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes...'. Like all parables, this one invites further reflection! 'Abiding in love', in the face of everything that threatens the vine, strengthens relationships without allowing a community to become defensive and turn in on itself.*

15 I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. 2 He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. 3 You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 4 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. 5 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. 6 Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

### **Time to reflect – with the Revd Jane Isaac, Incumbent of the United Benefice of St John the Baptist, Shedfield and St Nicholas, Wickham**

As you'll surely have noticed by now, I'm not the keenest gardener in the world. I enjoy doing things in the garden, but I'm mostly clueless – that's especially evident when it comes to pruning things and cutting them back. Take the Rectory hedges, for instance, which when it's my turn to look after them tend to be unkempt with a sort of Dennis the Menace messy haircut look about them. That's in stark contrast to when it's David's turn and they become things of beauty, shaped and groomed into the hedge equivalent of a salon cut.

So it's just as well that I don't need to know much about growing things to understand the gist of this morning's gospel story about looking after vines. Even I get the idea about cutting off the dead branches so that sunlight can reach the live

ones so that they'll produce fruit and then having a good bonfire to get rid of the dead wood.

Well, I don't know much about growing grapes, but I *have* learnt a bit about growing blackcurrants. Thirty-five years ago we put two blackcurrant bushes from my mum's allotment into pots on the balcony of our London flat. When we moved to Portsmouth they went into our garden and they thrived so well that when we moved to the Isle of Wight we didn't think it was fair to uproot them and take them with us. But that meant no more blackcurrants and more importantly, no more jam.



So last year I finally got round to planting some new blackcurrant bushes in the Rectory garden. I have to admit they didn't do very well, and the other month I gave them a good short back and sides and moved them into a sunnier spot. They deserve a second chance because they're not actually dead, just struggling – because I'd planted them in the wrong place in my hurry to get them growing and then I neglected them.

In the Old Testament the vine is often used as a symbol for Israel, and as we've seen it's usually mentioned in the context of having been allowed to run wild so that the fruit-bearing branches produce lots of small, poor quality grapes.

This morning's gospel invites us to think about whether or not we're one of faith's dead or living branches, and to do something about it. But as I discovered when I tried to hurry along those blackcurrant bushes, frantic activity doesn't guarantee fruit. No – the way to fruitfulness is found in an old-fashioned word that's repeated five times in our reading: '*abide*'. 'Abide in me,' says Jesus, 'and you will be fruitful'. How much can we learn from that! I'm evidently not the best person to impart garden wisdom, but even I have noticed that when space is made in a garden, something else will soon grow there. Sometimes less is more. What needs pruning in our lives and in our church lives, so that the Vine might produce abundant, sweet fruit?

Now, my engagement with football is even less committed than my engagement with gardening, but even so, I couldn't help but be drawn into last week's debate for and against the European Super League and the rapid response to get things sorted out. Fans, players, managers, politicians and even royalty publicly opposed it, claiming that the plans valued earnings and status over fans and sportsmanship.

Within three days, most teams had withdrawn and the plans were dropped, but it's sparked a debate as to whether or not football has lost sight of its roots and clubs have lost their connections to fans and communities. Jesus used that image of branches on a vine to get his listeners thinking about the importance of remaining rooted in and connected to him. Just as a branch needs to remain connected to the vine to be nourished and bear fruit – and a football team needs to remain connected to its fans to be nourished and thrive – followers of Jesus need to connect with him for their faith to be nourished and to grow. So: what helps you feel connected to God? What routines and habits help you to remain connected to Jesus?



*'Why the Super League failed' (©The Economist)*

Christianity is dynamic. It's about life – new, abundant, generous life. But we mustn't work too feverishly to be good disciples. Remember those blackcurrant bushes. Although the pruning and the fruit are important, the roots matter as well. We need spiritual nourishment to grow, rooted in the community of the church, and our priorities must be to pray and to read the scriptures. And then, abiding in Christ, we can share in the new life of Easter in all its challenging, thrilling and dynamic reality. Amen.

### **A time for prayer**

*Remembering that today is Rogation Sunday, we are challenged to recognise our common humanity and shared responsibility for each other and for our world. So let's take this time to reflect and remind ourselves of the things in which we believe.*

Do we believe and trust in God the Father,  
source of all being and life,  
the one for whom we exist? *(Take some time to reflect on this question...)*  
We believe and trust in him.

Do we believe and trust in God the Son,  
who lives in our hearts through faith,  
and fills us with his love? *(Take some time to reflect on this question...)*  
We believe and trust in him.

Do we believe in God the Holy Spirit,  
who gives life to the people of God  
and makes Christ known in the world? *(Take some time to reflect on this question...)*  
We believe and trust in him.

This is our faith, the faith of the Church.  
 We believe and trust in one God,  
 Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
 Amen.



*God of comfort and truth*, as India faces the ravages of Covid-19, we pray for relief from suffering. May those countries with an excess of precious vaccines and medical and health care resources be moved to generous sharing.

We pray for the leaders of the world; for those tasked with making the decisions which affect our lives. Help them to engage with the suffering of the poorest and most disadvantaged and work with integrity towards deep and lasting change.

And at home, with UK local elections coming this week, we pray for a spirit of openness and fairness and for a commitment to community and care; to politics beyond party.

*God of comfort and truth,*  
*hear our prayer.*

*God of hope*, we acknowledge the variety of feelings within our local communities prompted by the easing of lockdown restrictions – there are those of us who are exhilarated by trips to the hairdressers or the pub or by going out for a coffee; those of us who are anxious about the possibility of a new surge; and those of us who are somewhere in between.



May we find understanding and empathy for one another. Give us all the ability to think in terms of the whole community not just about ourselves, and help us to keep our eyes open so that we might see how those around us are coping as things change.

Re-energise us, and inspire and equip us for new ways of ministry in our churches, our deanery and our diocese so that we can share in bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth and hope to the people in it.

*God of hope,  
hear our prayer.*

God of compassion, we remember all those for whom this will be a difficult day, for those who are poorly at home or in hospital, for those whose lives are blighted by long-Covid, for those who are worried about the effects of the pandemic on their future, their finances, their jobs, their family life.

And we pray for those who have died, and those who mourn their passing, remembering especially Juliet as she grieves for Fred and their long life together. We give thanks for all that Fred brought to our communities, for his robust common sense, his commitment to our worship and our life together and his stalwart support of Juliet's ministry. May he rest in peace and rise in glory.

*God of compassion,  
hear our prayer.*

God of community and family, we pray especially today for our schools as they settle into the new term. St John the Baptist Primary School will enjoy its 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary this week and so this morning we pray with them:



Father God,  
we thank you for our school,  
for all that makes our school unique,  
for the trust, friendship and respect  
that are at the centre of our school life together.  
As we remember the past,  
celebrate the present  
and look to the future  
give us vision, courage and energy  
to be lifelong learners,  
who love life, love learning and love you.  
Amen.

*God of community and family,  
hear our prayer.*

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 trespasses,  
 as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
 And lead us not into temptation;  
 but deliver us from evil.  
 For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory;  
 for ever and ever.  
 Amen.

Lord,  
 you are a God of comfort and truth,  
 of hope, compassion and community.  
 You are a God of love.  
 Help each of us to abide in you and produce fruit –  
 the best fruit we can.  
 Prune us back, and take away those parts of our lives  
 that get in the way of each other and of you.  
 Help us to concentrate on the things you have truly called us to do.  
 Help us to notice and celebrate the gifts you have given to each one of us,  
 and encourage us to make the best use of them to grow your Kingdom  
 in our lives, our homes and our communities  
 today and in the days to come.  
 Amen.

### **Hymn: Love divine, all loves excelling**

Read/pray the words or join in here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VFckPOF93JM>

- 1 Love divine, all loves excelling,  
 joy of heaven, to earth come down,  
 fix in us thy humble dwelling,  
 all thy faithful mercies crown.  
 Jesu, thou art all compassion,  
 pure unbounded love thou art;  
 visit us with thy salvation,  
 enter every trembling heart.
  
- 2 Come, almighty to deliver,  
 let us all thy grace receive;

suddenly return, and never,  
 nevermore thy people leave.  
 Thee we would be always blessing,  
 serve thee as thy hosts above;  
 pray and praise thee without ceasing,  
 glory in thy perfect love.

- 3 Finish then thy new creation,  
 pure and spotless let us be;  
 let us see thy great salvation  
 perfectly restored in thee.  
 Changed from glory into glory,  
 'til in heaven we take our place,  
 'til we cast our crowns before thee,  
 lost in wonder, love and praise.

Words: C Wesley (1707–1788 ) Tune: BLAENWERN

**You might choose to slowly read and reflect on John 15.1–8...**



*Jesus said, 'I am the vine...*

I am your origin,  
 your nutrients, your mainstay.  
 Root yourself in me.  
 Let yourself be fed.  
 Let yourself grow... closer and deeper.  
 And in the growing, allow the pruning.  
 Allow me to prune, to trim, to cut away  
 your broken branches,  
 your fruitless parts,  
 your strivings,  
 branches that are going to seed.

And watch and wait.  
 Wait for the new shoots.  
 Wait for the new fruits to bud slowly and open gently.  
 Turn to my warmth, and let your fruits open in my glory.'  
*Jesus said, 'I am the vine...and you are the branches.'*  
 Amen.

**A prayer of blessing**

God's love is shown in Jesus for us.

God's love is shown in Jesus for those we love.

God's love is shown in Jesus for the whole world.

And may the blessing of God,

Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer,

be with us and those we love,

today and always.

Amen.

Christ is risen.

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

**For to enjoy now or later...**

People often tell me that they can't pray because they don't know the right words. There aren't *any* wrong words when it comes to praying, but there are certainly lots of words to choose from! If finding the words to pray is something that worries you, you could try writing an acrostic poem or prayer using the initial letters of a verse from Scripture or one of the day's hymns.

Supposing you were to choose a verse from today's Gospel, using the letters of Abide in me as the first letter of each line...

Abide in me, Lord.

Be with me

In all that I do.

Dear Lord,

Every day...

**W**.....

**I**.....

**T**.....

**H**.....

**M**.....

**E**.....

Over to you! Please do share your acrostic prayers:

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