**Service of Worship including Communion – Sunday 2nd May 2021**

**Welcome and opening words**

Good morning! Welcome to Worship here in the Rochdale, Bury and North Manchester Missional Partnership. I am the Revd Richard Bradley one of the Partnership ministers.

We gather in the power and presence of God – the creator of all that is.
We gather in the power and presence of the risen Lord Jesus Christ – the son of the living God.

We gather in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit – who empowered the first disciples and empowers us to be the people God has called us and set us apart to be.

As part of our service today we will share together in Communion – so if you want to share with us then please go and get bread and wine/juice so that we can remember and share together.

I want to read to you some words from verse 1 of “Be still” and I will pause in between every two lines for us to be still:-

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here….. *(we pause)*

Come bow before Him now with reverence and fear….. *(we pause)*

In Him no sin is found - we stand on Holy ground. *(we pause)*

Be still, for the presence of the Lord, the Holy One is here…. *(we pause)*

And now we come to sing our first hymn of praise….

**Opening Song: Jesus, melt my cold heart**

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| 1..Jesus, melt my cold heart,Break my stony emotions.'Cause I've been playing with the wavesWhen I should be swimming in the ocean. | 2.. Jesus, show Your mercy,I'm so sorry for waiting;I should be running to Your heart,But I know I've been hesitating. |
| Chorus: *Take me deeper,**Show me more.**It's all or nothing;**I give You everything, my Lord.* | Caroline Bonnett & Steve BassettCopyright © 2001 Thankyou Music ccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811  |

**Prayers**

God of the weak and God of the strong.

God of the rich and God of the poor.

God of the oppressed and God of the liberated.

We come before you in worship and praise today. We come and set aside this time to read/watch this service. We may come divided by the walls of our homes but we come united in the Holy Spirit to offer you the praise and worship that you, living God, deserve.
Help us today to hear your voice through the songs we sing…the prayers we offer…the Bible reading we hear and the preaching of Your Word contained in the Bible.

May we end later having been refreshed and restored to live as your people in the week that lies ahead.

As we gather and enter your presence, we are conscious of our weaknesses and failings. We confess those times when we have hurt others or ourselves. When we have let you down. When we have failed to live as Easter people….forgive us for all our wrongs and renew us we pray.

And Lord having confessed our wrong doing may we know, believe and accept that we are fully and truly forgiven. For we offer this prayer in the name of Jesus, Amen.

**Introduction to the theme**

Here I am using a YouTube video entitled: “I am the True Vine Children’s Talk”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKl6zmr7qzE>

**Hymn: I danced in the morning**

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| 1.. I danced in the morning when the world was begun,and I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun,and I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth:at Bethlehem I had my birth. | 2.. I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee,but they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me;I danced for the fishermen, for James and John;they came with me and the dance went on: |
| 3.. I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame:the holy people said it was a shame.They whipped and they stripped and they hung me on high,and they left me there on a cross to die: | 4.. I danced on a Friday when the sky turned black;it's hard to dance with the devil on your back.They buried my body and they thought I'd gone;but I am the dance, and I still go on: |
| 5.. They cut me down and I leapt up high;I am the life that'll never, never die.I'll live in you if you'll live in me:I am the Lord of the dance, said he. | Chorus: *Dance, then, wherever you may be,**I am the Lord of the dance, said he,**and I'll lead you all, wherever you may be,**and I'll lead you all in the dance, said he.* |
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**Bible Reading: John 15:1-8 - The vine and the branches (NIVUK)**

**15**‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. **2**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. **3**You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. **4**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.

**5**‘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. **6**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. **7**If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **8**This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

We thank God for this reading from His Word.

**Song: We are heirs of God’s Kingdom**

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| 1..We are heirs of God AlmightyApple of the Father’s eye;Free, forgiven, loved, accepted,Clothed in righteousness divine.Chosen to be pure and blamelessFrom before the world began;Grace for every situation,Sheltered in the Father’s hand. | 2.. We have Christ at work within us,Shaping us to be like Him;Resurrection power sustainingFreedom from the snares of sin.Saying no to flesh desires,Saying yes to righteous ways;Filled with passion and with power,Lights that burn in darkened days. |
| 3.. We’ve the Spirit without measure,Helper, Comforter and Guide;One who brings the gifts of heaven,One who comes to walk beside.Taste of heaven’s endless pleasure,Guarantee of what’s to come;Causing fruit to grow in action,Bringing glory to the Son. | Stuart TownendCopyright © 2002 Thankyou MusicCcli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811  |

**Reflecting together on God’s Word**

Let’s pray: Living God, as we reflect together, whether reading this script or watching the video, may our ears and hearts be open to Your Word. May your Holy Spirit speak to each one us and may our faith be deepened in the encounter. Amen.

*Ruth is the gardener in our household. She does a great job in planting and tending the garden beds. She prunes when things in the garden need pruning. This year, however, she has a four-legged assistant! The problem is the dog prunes when pruning isn’t always needed! It is safe to say our dog is no Alan Titchmarsh! The planting done in our garden this year has to be out of reach of our young, active, keen dog!*

The reading set before us today in the Lectionary is one that offers great challenge and great comfort! The comfort is knowing that as Christians we can remain as branches on the vine. We remain close to Jesus when we follow his example, when we read and obey God’s Word in the Bible, when we pray to him and listen for his voice. Remaining in him is so important for us on our journey of discipleship.

During the Pandemic and the lockdown and isolation we have had to look at different ways of worshipping and learning as disciples of Jesus. There have been times when we have been separate from each other when we might normally have been gathered in our churches for corporate, in person worship.

For some of our churches in the Missional Partnership they have remained closed since the start of the first lockdown. Other churches have opened as soon as we have been allowed to after each of the lockdowns.

We have, in different ways, tried to remain as close to each other as possible. But, thankfully, the pandemic has not stopped us from being close to God! We can be close to God in our churches or in our homes. We can be close to God whether alone or with others. This reading offers comfort to us for as Christians and followers of Jesus we remain in the vine which is Jesus.

And we have God as the gardener! I think this is a wonderful image of God. He’s the one that loves and tends the branches of the vine. God’s the one who looks after, cares for, nurtures, feeds the vine so that it will produce good fruit.

But as in all our gardens….there are times when branches need pruning and that can be difficult. It can be painful. And that is what I have called the “challenge” in this reading.

Sometimes we cut ourselves off from the vine. We can do that when we fail to read God’s Word, when we cease praying, when we stop worshipping (whether that is corporate worship and/or worship in our daily lives) and any branch removed from the vine will eventually wither and die because it is not getting the nourishment it needs to survive.

And that is the same for us as Christians. If we detach ourselves from the vine (Jesus) then we will be cut off from the source of life and will spiritually wither and die.

***I must say here that if you are someone reading this or watching this who is unable to go to Church and be with other believers because of ill health or an inability to travel – you are not cutting yourself off from the vine! That is a different situation altogether.***

*I apologise for those who have heard this story before….when I was growing up I was part of a strong youth group at my home church. It was in a time when God worked powerfully in the lives of many of my friends. And we wrote encouraging comments in the front and back pages of each other’s Bibles. I still have the Bible although I don’t use that one much now as it is falling apart a little.*

*But I recall pulling it off the shelf one day a few years after being involved in the youth group and I read the comments and saw the names of the people who wrote encouraging messages to me on my early faith journey. Sadly all bar 3 names in the Bible were no longer part of the church or professing to be Christians!*

That saddened me enormously.

Friends when we cut ourselves off from the vine we will spiritually wither and die therefore must remain in the vine.

The second part of the challenge for me is the pruning! For those who are more green fingered than me will know that pruning is vital to allow a plant/shrub/tree to grow and to produce fruit or flowers that are greater than they would have been without the pruning! And sometimes the attractiveness of something in the garden is reduced when it is pruned….but….in time the growth is greater and stronger and more beautiful because of the pruning.

And sometimes in our spiritual lives we need to be pruned! Sometimes that can be welcome relief to have the spiritual secateurs out and others times that can be painful. When God cuts off branches in our lives that are not bearing fruit at all – that can a relief. To get rid of those parts that are not growing and producing fruit.

But sometimes God cuts back parts in us that might be producing fruit….but….in pruning the fruit will be so much better. And God takes his spiritual secateurs to our lives so that we will be strong, more committed followers of Jesus.

You may be in a place at present where God is pruning. It may be something you are thankful for that He is pruning…or for others it may be difficult to see certain branches in our lives being cut off and thrown away.

What we must believe is that God is doing it for our good and for the good of the Kingdom.

I want to close by using some words from Tom Wright in his book ‘John for Everyone’\*

***“The vine-dresser is never closer to the vine, taking more thought over its long-term health and productivity, than when he has his knife in his hand.”***

That image that Tom Wright helpfully places in my mind, is one of a God of love who with his knife/secateurs in hand, carefully, lovingly and in a way only the creator of everything could do, prunes the branches of our lives so we bear fruit, fruit that lasts. Amen.

Let us pray together….

Holy God, thank you that you are the gardener who lovingly tends and prunes the branches on the vine.

Help us to remain in Jesus the vine so we can grow and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

Amen.

**Song leading into Communion:**

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| 1..When love came downto earthAnd made His home with men,The hopeless found a hope,The sinner found a friend.Not to the powerfulBut to the poor He came,And humble, hungry heartsWere satisfied again. | 2.. When every unclean thought,And every sinful deedWas scourged upon His backAnd hammered through His feet.The Innocent is cursed,The guilty are released;The punishment of GodOn God has brought me peace. |
| 3.. Come lay your heavy loadDown at the Master's feet;Your shame will be removed,Your joy will be complete.Come crucify your pride,And enter as a child;For those who bow down lowHe'll lift up to His side. | Chorus: *What joy, what peace has come to us!**What hope, what help, what love!* |
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**Communion**

As we come to share together and receive from the bread and wine of Communion I want to share with you some words from the Bible. In John’s Gospel the words that follow our Bible reading earlier are these and I think these words speak to us as we share in the bread and wine of Communion…. John 15:9-17:-

**9**‘As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. **10**If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. **11**I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. **12**My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. **13**Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. **14**You are my friends if you do what I command. **15**I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. **16**You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. **17**This is my command: love each other. (NIVUK)

Friends we gather though physically apart we are united spiritually by the power of the Holy Spirit to offer ourselves afresh at the table of the Lord.

We gather to receive the bread and wine of communion, symbols of the body and blood of Jesus.

We gather acknowledging the presence of the risen Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit.
We gather remembering Jesus’ life and how he lived as we live.
He was hungry like we can be hungry. He was thirsty like we can be thirsty. He knew sadness as we can experience sadness. He knew joy as we can know joy.

We gather remembering his death. We can never fully grasp the enormity of the cost Christ paid for us on the cross. For on the cross Jesus bore the sin of humanity, past, present and to come.

He faced death that we might have the glorious possibility of eternal life.

We gather in this moment with our bread and wine/juice. Symbols that Jesus took on the night when he was betrayed. As we read in the Bible: **“ 22 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying: “Take it; this is my body.”
23 Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 “This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many,” he said to them.”** (Mark 13:22-24 NIVUK)

Let us pray….

Living God, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ who came to life and gave his life. We thank you for his suffering and pain that we might know the joy of resurrection and life everlasting.

We offer you ourselves along with this bread and wine…asking that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may be transformed to become more like Jesus as we share in this bread and wine.

We pray for your Holy Spirit to come upon the bread and wine/juice that we have in front of us that for us these earthly elements may have heavenly significance and be symbols of the body and blood of Jesus.

For we have no hope but the hope we have in Jesus. And we come and kneel before you offering ourselves afresh to you. Fill us as you feed us in Jesus’ name, Amen.

Friends, on the night in which Jesus was betrayed he took bread, broke it and gave thanks for it. He invited those gathered with him to take the bread and eat and now we take the bread and eat.

*(pause as we eat the bread)*

After supper, Jesus took the cup of wine and gave thanks for it. He invited those gathered with him to take the cup and drink and now we take the cup and drink.

*(pause as we drink the wine/juice)*

Let’s pray – Loving God, we thank you for feeding us with the bread and wine of new life.

We thank you for Jesus and for his life, death and resurrection. May we continue to live in him and to grow in him. May he continue to live in is and grow in us.

For we ask this in his name. Amen.

We now continue in prayer as Karen leads us in our prayers of intercession….

**Prayers of Intercession (Karen Grayson)**

Let us join together in our prayers of Intercession.

Dear Lord. Help us to be like salt to your lamp, using our prayers to carry your light across the world. The light that unites Christians everywhere and helps us to guide others along the way. While we give thanks that we are safe here in our faith, let us remember those for whom Christianity is a risk. This morning we pray for those worshipping in secret, afraid of persecution from the authorities. We remember all those across the world living in makeshift houses, scratching to earn enough to just feed themselves. And for those still dying from easily treatable illnesses because they don’t have access to medicines and healthcare.

We pray for families separated by current travel restrictions, and hope that they can be reunited soon. And the lonely, those who aren’t lucky enough to live with their loved ones. We ask that you be with us Lord, and that you guide us to be where you need us, seeking out and supporting those who need it the most.

And we ask that you be with the Church. Guiding our leaders as we try to steer a clear path through these uncertain times. Be with the churches that are already open, keeping them safe, and also the churches preparing to open in the next few weeks. Please Lord, help us all to make the right decisions. Many of your followers are at a crossroads, trying to balance the longing to join in worship with their church families once again, and worrying about the possible risks this may bring to themselves and their loved ones. Be with them Lord, in each and every decision along the way.

And finally, we pray for ourselves, those of us still here worshipping in unison. We give thanks for the many gifts you have given us, the people in our lives and the fellowship we share. Be with us as we celebrate the good times along with the bad. And take time to remember those personal to each of us who may be ill or struggling at the moment, those we all know who need a special moment of prayer just for them. We ask that you take extra care of those in need over the coming week.

As we bring these pleas before you, we pray that you are with us always, listening and guiding.

Amen.

**Closing Song:**

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| a.. 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. | b.. Then we'll grow in Your love,Then we'll go in Your name,that the world will surely knowthat You have power to heal and to save.  |
| c.. You are the vine, we are the branches,keep us abiding in You.  | Danny Daniels and Randy Rigby©1985 Mercy/Vineyard Publishingccli 169737 Streaming Licence 595811  |

**Final prayer for the week ahead**

May the God of love, peace, joy and forgiveness be with each and everyone one of us.

May He make us more like Jesus and may we continue into the coming week empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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(\*quote in the reflection from *“JOHN for Everyone”* written by Tom Wright, SPCK, London, first published in 2002, reprinted 8 times and this edition is 2014, quote from page 71)