

The Upper Culm Valley Mission Community
The Parishes of Hemyock with Culm Davy, Culmstock and Clayhidon

28 April 2024
Fifth Sunday of Easter
Worship sheet

Welcome to Sunday worship

This is annual meeting season! Hemyock and Culmstock churches have had their annual meetings and Clayhidon holds its meeting this Sunday. As charities, annual meetings are a requirement in order for our aims, business and finances to be made public and examined. And although that doesn't excite a great deal of interest outside the church community it provides a useful point of review for us. It is an opportunity to look back together and reflect on the past we have travelled together over the past year and consider all that has been achieved. Jesus' words in John's Gospel speak to us about our calling as churches.

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.

Gospel reading: John 15:1-8: The Vine and the Branches

Jesus said to his disciples,

'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

by Revd Becky Totterdell

In our Gospel reading from John 15, Jesus gives us a picture of himself as a vine, well planted, flourishing and growing strong, and urges us to see ourselves as part of him, as his branches. It's a very relevant picture as we consider our life together as churches.

What are we about as a community of Christians?

We are a group of people who define ourselves first and foremost by our relationship to Jesus Christ.

He is the vine, we are the branches. He isn't just the stem, but the whole thing; we are an integral part of him as his branches. Bank branches are now few and far between, but wherever there are Christians, and especially groups of Christians, there is Jesus Christ. He has branches everywhere!

I wonder how you start off a conversation with someone you've never met before – trying to get an idea of who it is you are talking with, what their background is, where they're from, what makes them tick? It's easy to pigeonhole people by what they do, or by how wealthy we think they are, or by their family circumstances. All these factors about us are irrelevant in comparison to the really important thing that defines who we are: our relationship to Jesus Christ. At our baptism we became part of the vine. Our lives are now totally bound up with his. Because he has died on our behalf, we shall share in due course in the resurrection. This shines a light from the future back into our present and affects how we see today and live today.

So what makes us distinctive as a community, in comparison with all the other community groups we might be a part of, is that we draw our life and nourishment from Jesus. Our services, study groups and prayer times together are designed to help us do that. And there is effort involved on our part to put ourselves in those places where we can be nourished. At the same time, the vine is always working to nourish the branches, new stems, newly forming leaves and growing buds; so our Lord is always working to nourish each of us with his love and his life.

Over the coming weeks following our annual meetings, each of our church congregations will have the opportunity to renew our baptism promises in a form of commissioning. Commissioning not just of our churchwardens and PCC members, but each of us as members of this community of Jesus. So one of the questions we will be asked in renewing our baptismal promises is this: 'Will you continue in the apostle's teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?' in other words, keeping immersed in scripture and applying it to our lives, meeting together for worship, and being faithful in prayer. Strengthening our link to the vine.

With Jesus and ourselves together as the vine, we are no longer just a bunch of individuals but an organic, community venture.

In a plant, each branch helps feed the others through its leaves photosynthesising and sending nourishment back into the plant which supports it. During lockdown it became painfully obvious how important community is to our flourishing as individuals. It's no accident that all the pictures the Bible gives us of humanity flourishing are in the context of fruitful community life, whether that's Old Testament Israel, the community of disciples, or the 'new Jerusalem' foreseen in the Revelation of St John. What enables and enriches our flourishing is not our similarities but our differences. A tree is a whole ecosystem, and it's the same for us as church congregations. Each year at our annual meetings we celebrate the diversity of gifts the Spirit of God has given us to contribute to the flourishing of all. The relevant question for us here in the commissioning is, 'Will you seek and serve Christ in all people, loving your neighbour as yourself?'

As a community of Christians drawing on nourishment from Jesus Christ, we are a people called to channel of the life of Jesus into the world around.

Jesus says to us, 'This is to my father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.'

Our lives are to be productive and full of goodness – like a branch that produces a heavy crop of grapes, sweet and juicy! What does Jesus mean? It means that the work Jesus began during his years on earth is to be continued by us; his work of connecting people with God, of working for the healing and the well-being of others, and of living in the grace and love of God so that we can pass this on to other people too. For some of us this will mean getting actively involved in politics. For others it will mean regular prayer and giving for those involved in the work of healing and outreach in places of devastation in our world. For some it will involve playing a part in strengthening our local community networks in the villages and providing companionship and support for those among whom we live. There is something for each of us to do in living out Jesus's commission to bear fruit to sweeten and nourish the world.

In the words of commissioning and recommitment to our baptismal promises, we will be asked, 'Will you seek and serve Christ in all people, loving your neighbour as yourself?' And, 'Will you acknowledge Christ's authority over human society, by prayer for the world and its leaders, by defending the weak, and by seeking peace and justice?'

So our commissioning liturgy spells out what 'abiding in the vine' looks like in practice in our life together, in our drawing together to Christ week by week

to be nourished by him; in our support and nourishing of one another as a community; and in our living out our calling together to nourish the world around us in his name.

May you know the strength that comes from abiding in him, of companionship with one another, and reaching out in generosity of spirit to our communities.

Renewal of Baptismal promises

Those who are baptized are called to worship and serve God. Will you continue in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

All With the help of God, I will.

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

All With the help of God, I will.

Will you proclaim by word and example the good news of God in Christ?

All With the help of God, I will.

Will you seek and serve Christ in all people, loving your neighbour as yourself?

All With the help of God, I will.

Will you acknowledge Christ's authority over human society, by prayer for the world and its leaders, by defending the weak, and by seeking peace and justice?

All With the help of God, I will.

Eternal God, our beginning and our end, preserve in your people the new life of baptism, as Christ receives us on earth, so may he guide us through the trials of this world and enfold us in the joy of heaven, where you live and reign, one God for ever and ever.

All Amen.