

The Vine at Home
Fifth Sunday in Lent – Year B
Sunday 21st March 2021

Call to worship

Let us meet with the Lord, let us follow the Christ, let us be filled with the Spirit,
Today and everyday. Amen.¹

Hymn: 46 STF – Everlasting God

Opening Prayers

Everlasting God ,we come before you today, just as we are. We come with the things
that weigh us down. We come with the parts of ourselves we would prefer to hide.

Our regrets, our fears, our shame.

You know every part of us and yet you call us by name, just as we are. You welcome
us in as part of your family. So, we come.

We come to seek your light, your peace, your wholeness, your hope.

You call us to share your love with the world. To sow hope and build bridges,
especially at this time of physical separation and distance.

We pray that you will strengthen us to be your people of light.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.²

Let us now say the Lord's Prayer

Readings: Jeremiah 31:31-34 - A New Covenant

31 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with
the house of Israel and the house of Judah. **32** It will not be like the covenant that I
made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land
of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband,[²] says
the Lord. **33** But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after
those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their
hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. **34** No longer shall they
teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity,
and remember their sin no more.³

¹ Call to Worship written by Tim Baker

² Opening prayers written by Emma Dobson

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John 12:20 -33 - Some Greeks Wish to See Jesus

20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. **21** They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” **22** Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. **23** Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. **24** Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. **25** Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26** Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour.

Jesus Speaks about His Death

27 “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. **28** Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” **29** The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” **30** Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. **31** Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. **32** And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people^[a] to myself.” **33** He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.⁴

Reflections on the readings

Today is Passion Sunday and I wonder what first comes to your mind when you hear the word passion? For many people, passion is associated with love and desire. When we are passionate about someone or something, we care deeply about them. What are you passionate about?

[If you are using these resources to lead a service on video conferencing – e.g. Zoom – you might like to ask people to share or put in the chat box what they are passionate about. And/or you could suggest the following examples.]

Perhaps you are passionate about football or cats or a particular music group or author or actress. Perhaps you share Marcus Rashford’s passion for free school meals; or you are passionate about the need to do something about climate change; or you have a passion to ensure that everyone in the developing world gets access to the Covid vaccine.

We may also have passions and desires which we would not be willing to share with others – and have perhaps not even fully admitted to ourselves. Lent is traditionally a time for fasting and times of physical hunger can put us in touch with the deeper yearnings that we sometimes try to satisfy by comfort eating or binge-watching box sets or retail therapy. Passion Sunday is a good opportunity to reflect on what the

⁴ Bible Text is from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved

God, “to whom all hearts are open, and all desires known”, might be asking us to acknowledge.

Our Gospel reading began with some Greeks sharing their desire with Philip – one of Jesus’ disciples. “We wish to see Jesus,” they tell him.

Many churches have experienced new people connecting with their online worship and other activities during the pandemic. Maybe you can identify with Philip in this passage because you have had new people come to you and express an interest in finding out more about the church. They may not have used the words “we want to see Jesus” and that desire may - or may not - have been behind their request. It’s always interesting to ask both long-term church members and newer people what it is that they are looking for. I wonder what desires brought you to church?

[Again, if you are using this on e.g. Zoom you could ask people to respond to this question and/or share your own testimony about why you came to church in the first place and/or keep coming now.]

I also wonder what you make of how Philip responded to these Greeks. He doesn’t immediately give them the Zoom invite! He goes off to tell Andrew about this request and then Andrew and Philip together go to see Jesus. This models good collaborative ministry and safeguarding practice but I’m also curious about why Philip needed to check this out. Was it because they were Greeks - in other words Gentiles, outsiders, foreigners? Did he think: “Well, you might want to see Jesus - but I’m not sure Jesus will want to see you!” Was this a bit like that other occasion when the disciples rebuked those who were trying to bring their children to Jesus? (Mark 10:13)

It’s important for us to think about how we respond to people who approach our church. How welcome do they feel? What barriers do we put in their way? What does our reaction to them reveal about our own unconscious biases and our own desires? Let’s be honest here. Who do you actually want to come to your church? And who would you rather keep out?

Philip shows us a way of dealing with these questions. Talk to another church member about your feelings and, most importantly, talk to Jesus! Notice how Jesus responds to people who want to see him. You might even want to take some time this week to read though the whole of John’s Gospel. You will find lots of references to seeing in John – from the prologue where we read that the Word became flesh and we have seen his glory (1:14) right through to Thomas after Easter, not being able to believe until he had seen his risen Lord (20:25).

We have come to worship today because we also want to see Jesus – but seeing Jesus over the next couple of weeks is not going to be easy. “We wish to see Jesus,” say the Greeks. Is that truly our desire too? What might that mean we have to look at? Jesus responds to the Greeks’ request by saying that “the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”. Glory, like seeing, is an important theme in John’s

Gospel. And these two themes are connected because those who see Jesus, see God's glory. It seems paradoxical, of course, to see glory in the crucifixion. The cross was an instrument of shame. But when Jesus is lifted up on the cross, he is exalted. He reveals God's glory.

However, I want to make it quite clear that to see glory in the cross is not to glorify death. We have all been horrified – and many of us have been personally affected – by the Covid death toll. It feels like we have been living in Passiontide since Passion Sunday last year. The word passion originally comes from a Latin word meaning suffering and only later came to be associated with love and desire. On this Passion Sunday, as we remember the suffering which Jesus endured, let's not forget all those people locally and globally who are going through their own passion today. Specifically, for all who are facing pain and death, for all who are watching someone they love take their last breath, and for all who are unable to be together because they are in lockdown.

"Sir, we want to see Jesus," said the Greeks to Philip. If someone said that to you, where would you direct them? Where is Jesus to be seen today?

[Again, if you are using this on e.g. Zoom you could ask people to respond to this question either verbally or by using the chat box.]

The best of all is, God is with us. John Wesley's deathbed words remind us that the Christ who suffered and died on the cross is still present with those who are suffering and dying today.

Our God is a passionate God – a God who loves us deeply enough to share our pain and death so that we might see the glory of heaven. So, if you want to see Jesus, come, and survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died. And then ask yourself: Can people see the love of God in me? Am I, like Philip, someone who is seen as being close to Christ? When I see where Jesus is leading me, am I still prepared to follow?

Passion involves love and passion involves suffering. May the God who is passionate about us deepen our love and strengthen us in our suffering this Passiontide and always.⁵

What are you being called to?

In the book of Ruth, Ruth says to her mother-in-law Naomi, "...your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

Ruth had a sense of calling that seemed to be both a duty and a delight. How do you think this is also true in the roles you have in the church, your work, your family and with friends?

⁵ Reflection written by Nicola Vidamour

What opportunities to serve might enable you to know God in a different way?

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, it is through our active ministry as the church and as individual Christians, we encounter you. Over the past few months, we have encountered working for you as a duty and at times a delight.

In the quiet, we think of the times it has been a delight to have the callings that we have. *[Pause]*.

In the quiet, we think of the times it has felt like a duty to enact the callings we have. *[Pause]*.

Thank you for both the duty and the delight. Amen.

Prayers of intercession

Lord God,

We are all part of your family. We are all bound together in a love that will never cease or grow tired. We offer you our prayers for your creation, for our siblings across the world in need of your hope and comfort.

We pray for those living in the midst of conflict, wondering if home will ever feel safe again. For those worried about loved ones who have gone to fight. For those sacrificing everything to protect their families and ensure their safety. We offer a prayer for peace, remembering that this must begin with us.

Leader: Lord of all hope

All: Shine your light in the darkness

We pray for victims of abuse of all kinds. For those who do not feel safe in the place they should call home. For victims of bullying in the workplace, who feel unable to speak up for fear of losing their job. For those trapped in toxic relationships and friendships. We give thanks for those who seek to provide freedom and a listening ear to victims of abuse, and we pray for the strength and compassion to provide the same in any way we can.

Leader: Lord of all hope

All: Shine your light in the darkness

We pray for those living in poverty, or without a safe place to call their own. For the families struggling to feed their children. For those forced to live on the streets, with even fewer places to go in this time of increased restrictions. For our siblings across the world whose countries are facing the worst of the climate crisis, and enduring the food and water shortages that often come with the extreme conditions.

Leader: Lord of all hope

All: Shine your light in the darkness

In a moment of silence, we bring before you those known to us, who are in need of your loving presence at this time:

[Silence]

Loving God, gather up the names spoken into the silence, and accept all of the prayers we offer today. It is easy to feel like our offerings are small, that the love we share doesn't go far, but we know that, in you, our small acts can spread far and wide. May we be bearers of your light in this world.

Leader: Lord of all hope

All: Shine your light in the darkness

In Jesus' name, we pray
Amen.⁶

Hymn: 552 STF – Here am I, Lord

Blessing

God of each moment, you go with us beyond this moment of worship,
You are with us in every step of our lives.
Inspire us to continue following you, and to open ourselves up to your calling on our lives. Amen.⁷

⁶ Prayers of intercession written by Emma Dobson

⁷ Additional prayers by Tim Baker