**2nd May 2021 Communion 10.30 am Andrew**

**Call to worship** Psalm 22:27-28

All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations.

**Hymn No. M.P. 656 The Lord is King! Lift up thy voice**

The Lord is King! lift up thy voice,

O earth, and all ye heavens rejoice;

from world to world the joy shall ring,

'The Lord omnipotent is King!'

The Lord is King! who then shall dare

resist His will, distrust His care,

or murmur at His wise decrees,

or doubt His royal promises?

The Lord is King! Child of the dust,

the Judge of all the earth is just;

holy and true are all His ways:

let every creature speak His praise.

He reigns! ye saints, exalt your strains;

your God is King, your Father reigns;

and He is at the Father's side,

the man of love, the crucified.

One Lord, one empire, all secures;

He reigns, and life and death are yours,

through earth and heaven

one song shall ring,

'The Lord omnipotent is King!'

Josiah Conder (l789- 1855) CCLI 150801

**Prayer and Lord’s Prayer**

As we gather together although in our own homes we come before God as part of the world wide church of Jesus Christ. Loving God help us to come with open hearts and minds to enable us to truly express our praise and thanksgiving for the way you showed your love for us in and through the life, death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. Help us to listen for your word this morning as you speak to each one of us in our individual situations. Forgive us for those times when what we say and do are not worthy of you and inspire us in our living to show your love to those we meet each day in ways that give you the glory that is rightfully yours. May our time of worship uplift our hearts and prepare us for the week ahead. We ask all our prayers in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ as we share in the prayer he taught us…..

**Lord’s Prayer**

**Notices, Mission Prayer, Dedication of Offering**

**Reading** John 15:1-8 Jesus the real vine

**Reading** Acts 8:26-40 Philip and the Ethiopian official

**Hymn No. M.P. 788 You are beautiful beyond description**

You are beautiful beyond description,

too marvellous for words,

too wonderful for comprehension,

like nothing ever seen or heard.

Who can grasp Your infinite wisdom?

Who can fathom the depth of Your love?

You are beautiful beyond description,

Majesty, enthroned above.

And I stand, I stand in awe of You;

I stand, I stand in awe of You.

Holy God, to whom all praise is due,

I stand in awe of You.

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**Sermon Tuned in to God**

We have many pictures of Jesus in the bible and John gives us seven where Jesus speaks of himself in what we call the ‘I am sayings.’ In today’s passage Jesus used the traditional picture of a vine to describe how he saw the relationship between himself and the disciples and subsequently all those who would become his followers down the centuries. It is the main stem of the vine which is rooted in the ground and which draws food from out of the ground in order to pass it on to the branches and enable growth. That stem also has the strength to support the whole plant and stop it collapsing to the ground. Therefore, it may seem totally simple, totally obvious, but without the main stem there is no strength or sustenance for the branches to promote growth or produce fruit so the stem is essential to all the rest of the plant.

Jesus used this very common picture to emphasise the fact that it was just as essential for his followers to keep their link with him as the branches of a vine to keep their link with the main stem. He called himself the ‘real’ vine. People hang their hopes and desires on many different things in life, from the practical building up of material wealth to the spiritual which can include spiritualism, witchcraft and many varied types of religious beliefs. They see these things as essential to bring them happiness and fulfilment in life but if we go back to what Jesus was saying, if a person does not have a relationship with the one who created them and in whose image they have been made then, it seems to me, there is always going to be something missing from that persons life.

Jesus said ‘If you have seen me you have seen the Father’ therefore in and through his life and ministry, the way he lived and the way he treated the people he met, we can have an understanding of what God is like and how he desires a relationship with all people. Jesus also said ‘I am the way, the truth and the life, no one goes to the Father except by me’ therefore through his death and resurrection he is the only true link, the true vine through which a person can build that relationship with God and the only way they can draw their spiritual strength giving food from God. The importance of that is not just for the one person because the faith a person has and the gifts they are given are not to be used solely for their own individual benefit but for the benefit of all.

Therefore when Jesus spoke about lives bearing fruit, he meant all those good gifts from the Holy Spirit which enrich God’s people and enable them to make a difference in the places in the world in which God has set them. Gifts which help them to live out the two commandments of loving God with their whole selves and loving their neighbour as much as they love themselves. Gifts on which good relationships can be built and which help each person to be aware of others needs and put them before their own. Gifts which help people to cope with the pressures of life and build a life which is purpose driven and wholly fulfilling. And ultimately, gifts which enable a person to continue to grow in their relationship with God and through their life give him the glory which is rightfully his.

Jesus is the key to all this as the Ethiopian official discovered when he met Philip. It was no coincidence that Philip met the Ethiopian when he did. As a man with a strong faith Philip was ‘in touch with God’, he was open to listening to God speaking to him and in this instance leading him to be in the right place at the right time to share his belief with this Ethiopian who had been to Jerusalem to worship God yet was obviously searching for a deeper spiritual experience. He might have had an very important job in being responsible for the treasury of the Queen of Ethiopia yet he obviously did not find that role sufficiently fulfilling. There was something missing from his life that work or even worship in the Temple did not give him. As he approached Philip heard the man reading out loud from the scriptures and recognised it as being from the Prophet Isaiah. Asked if he understood the Ethiopian responded with what could well be the sort of answer that many would still give today. How can I understand if no one tells me. It was almost like he was in the position where he had been told what to believe but not why to believe it. He worshipped God as He was understood by the Jews and portrayed in the OT but he had no understanding of God as he was revealed in Jesus. So Philip offered to help him and was invited to sit in the carriage with the Ethiopian and speak with him about the meaning of the passage he was reading.

He was reading from what we now have as Isaiah 53 entitled in the New International Version of the Bible ‘The suffering and glory of the servant’ where the prophet writes of a man who, despite his innocence, would suffer and die yet through his death would come forgiveness and he would receive the glory and honour reserved for God himself. It sounds simple to say that ‘Philip told him the Good News about Jesus’ yet that is just what he did. Beginning where the man was - ready to listen and from the passage that he was reading but could not understand, Philip showed how it prophesied what would happen. How the Messiah would come and how Jesus was that man himself and then taking the Ethiopian through the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. Obviously there was not time to tell him everything but enough to challenge him to think about his own relationship with God and his response was to recognise his personal need to believe, to repent and to be baptised so that he too could receive the forgiveness that could come only through the death and resurrection of Jesus. So, when they came to some water the Ethiopian was baptised and then he was filled with the Holy Spirit and returned to his home and work a changed man.

Philip continued to be led by God and tell the people about Jesus where ever he went. It is a coming together of two very different people. Following the stoning of Stephen Philip had gone to Samaria where it was safer and he was then led by God to meet this Ethiopian eunuch who would be excluded from the Temple worship because of his bodily imperfections yet was prepared to travel long distances to Jerusalem to worship God there. If we set what happened between the two in the context of Jesus teaching we could talk about the way Philip spoke helping the man to see how there were things in his life which needed pruning out. Then how he was then grafted on to the vine that is Jesus so that he went through the process of taking a step of faith in believing in Jesus as God’s Son, in repenting and being forgiven, then being baptised and finally receiving the Holy Spirit

It is a story showing how God’s invitation to turn to him is open to everyone, that everyone has a part to play in his plans and the working of the Holy Spirit is central to it. Perhaps that is where some are a little concerned because to live in the midst of the activities of the Holy Spirit carries an element of unpredictability, not knowing what is next and where and when next will take place. Yet in reality none of us knows what tomorrow will bring and we know that we have already spent time talking, thinking and praying about where God is leading us here at Westfield and the building work having finally begun are the next steps for us which will bring new opportunities to continue the worship and mission which has been going on for almost 200 years.

God giving us guidance does not make us special, it calls us to be obedient but I can say with complete confidence that he does not send us and leave us to fend for ourselves but he guides us and because he loves us he will be with us every step of the way giving us what we need to serve him as faithfully as we can.

So listening to God’s call is not to be feared but seen as an opportunity to step out in faith with him on another exciting step of our journey whether that is together as a fellowship or in our individual lives. What we must do is be ready to listen when he speaks, to be tuned into what he is saying and when we hear him have the courage to do all we can to respond in faithful service.

**Prayers of Intercession**

Please use Neil’s prayer sheet along with your personal cares and concerns.

**Hymn No. M.P. 381 Jesus, stand among us**

Jesus, stand among us

at the meeting of our lives,

be our sweet agreement

at the meeting of our eyes;

O Jesus, we love You,

so we gather here,

join our hearts in unity

and take away our fear.

So to You we're gathering

out of each and every land,

Christ the love between us

at the joining of our hands;

O Jesus, we love You,

so we gather here,

join our hearts in unity

and take away our fear.

Jesus stand among us

at the breaking of the bread;

join us as one body

as we worship You, our Head.

O Jesus, we love You,

so we gather here;

join our hearts in unity

and take away our fear.

Graham Kendrick © 1977 Thankyou Music CCLI 150801

**Communion**

We come to God’s table because Jesus said ‘Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.’ He also said ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. Anyone who comes to me I will never turn away.’ So, we come to God’s table at his invitation. We come not because we must but because we may. We come as individuals but not alone. We come as the people of God open and ready to receive the gifts of God.

**The Institution**

Let us hear again the words of Institution of this feast as recorded by the Apostle Paul: *(1 Corinthians 11:23-26)*

For I received from the Lord the teaching that I passed on to you: that the Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed, took a piece of bread, gave thanks to God, broke it, and said: “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in memory of me.”

In the same way, after the supper he took the cup and said, “This cup is God’s new covenant, sealed with my blood. Whenever you drink it, do so in memory of me.”

This means that every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who east and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and following his example, we take this bread and this cup and give our thanks to God.

**Prayer – please** take a few moments to reflect on how you stand before God….

Loving God, through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. May we know your presence in the sharing of this bread so that we may know your presence in our lives.

Loving God, through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and the work of human hands. May we know your presence in the sharing of this wine so that we may know the refreshing of your Holy Spirit in our lives.

We celebrate the life that Jesus has shared among his community through the centuries, and shares with us now. Made one in Christ and one with each other we offer the bread and the wine and with them we offer ourselves, a single, holy, living sacrifice.

**Amen.**

**The bread** which we break is the communion of the body of Christ. Take, eat, it is the body of Christ given for you. Do this in remembrance of him.

**The cup** of blessing which we bless is the communion of the blood of Christ. Take it and drink, It is the new covenant in the blood of Christ shed for you and for all, for the forgiveness of sin: drink of it.

Prayer

Father of all, we give you thanks and praise, that when we were still far off you met us in your Son and brought us home. Dying and living, he declared your love, gave us grace, and opened the gate of glory. May we who share Christ's body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring life to others; we who the Spirit lights give light to the world. Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us; so that we and all your children may be free, and the whole earth live to praise your name; through Christ our Lord.

AMEN

**Hymn No. M.P. 187 God is love: let heaven adore him**

God is love: let heaven adore Him;

God is love: let earth rejoice;

let creation sing before Him,

and exalt Him with one voice.

He who laid the earth's foundation,

He who spread the heavens above,

He who breathes through all creation,

He is love, eternal love.

God is love: and He enfoldeth

all the world in one embrace;

with unfailing grasp He holdeth

every child of every race.

And when human hearts are breaking

under sorrow's iron rod,

all the sorrow, all the aching,

wrings with pain the heart of God.

God is love: and though with blindness

sin afflicts the souls of men,

God's eternal loving-kindness

holds and guides them even then.

Sin and death and hell shall never

o'er us final triumph gain;

God is love, so love for ever

o'er the universe must reign.

Timothy Rees(l874-1939)altd. © A R Mowbray & Co Ltd/Continuum CCLI 150801

**Blessing**

Go in the peace of God and may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.