



Beloved, Be Loved, Be Love

Gathering

Create a space for worship - perhaps with a small table with a bible, cross and candle.

This week, it would be appropriate to find a **white or gold** cloth or scarf for this special celebration.

Take some deep breaths as you gather your thoughts towards God.

Listen - We Abide, We Abide In You (The Porters Gate)

<https://theportersgate.bandcamp.com/track/we-abide-we-abide-in-you-feat-paul-zach>

Light Candle

In the darkness before the dawn,
amongst the darkest places of this world,
in the shadows of our own lives,
Jesus the Christ, the risen one, the Light of the World,
breaks in.

Light the candle

Christ is risen!

Christ is risen indeed!

Acknowledgement of Country

In this place,
where the land meets the sea,
where the sea makes a noise,
since time beyond our imagining,
the Wodi Wodi people of the Dharawal nation have cared for the land and the sea and its creatures great and small.

We pay our respects to their Elders and Leaders.

And we pray for our future together -

there is work to be done to build relationships that honour and respect those for whom this land is embedded in their being.

We commit ourselves to the way of love.

Call to Worship

The gardener is coming with twine and shears.

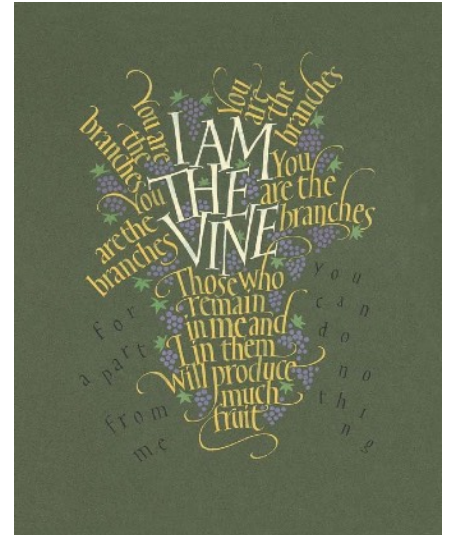
A bonfire is smouldering in the corner of the vineyard.

Are you ready to be pruned and reconfigured?

Are you ready to let go of your independence
and become part of something bigger?

"I am the real vine," Jesus said.

"Stick with me."



Opening prayer

Vine-grower,

during this time of worship, we come to grow and learn.

You offer us life, nourish us, and create a space to thrive.

May our worship draw us closer to you.

Shape and form our hearts and minds as we hear your word, sing your praises, and seek your guidance through prayer.

Strengthen us to bear good fruit today and in the days to come.

In the name of the one who proclaimed, "I am the vine". Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Easter 5 2021, p.156

Sing - A Voice Is Heard (ATW 430)

We sing a song of praise and as we gather, we listen for God's voice everywhere and all the time!

Come, let us praise our God,

come let us sing for joy.

With a heart of thanks we give honour.

You are a mighty God,

you are the source of life.

Creator God, we give praise.

Through the darkest night – a voice is heard.

Through the breaking dawn – a voice is heard.

Through the heart of life – a voice is heard.

All creation sings! God is heard!

Come, let us praise our God...

From the deepest seas – a voice is heard.

From the highest hills – a voice is heard.

From the rich dark earth – a voice is heard.

All creation sings! God is heard!

Come, let us praise our God...

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Prayer of Praise and Confession

God, in your mercy,

you gave Jesus as a gift to the world.

He became the vine that we might be the branches -

extending your goodness into our communities and world.

By your Spirit,

you resource and nourish us all,

making provision for the seeds of talent in each of us,

to flourish and burst forth in harvests of

love and kindness,

mercy and compassion,

justice and peace.

Impacting our world for good

and enhancing the lives of others.

Life-giving God,

you have gifted each with the ability to love,

yet there are times we fail to act in loving ways.

There are times we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves.

Instead, we have ignored, coveted, stolen from, and hurt those who live in community with us.

There are times when we reject the love of others.

Instead, we have been too proud, too busy, too narrow-minded, too consumed with our own lives.

There are times when we have not loved ourselves.

Instead, we have neglected our needs, denied ourselves forgiveness and grace, put others before ourselves in unhealthy ways.

In these times, we distance ourselves further from you, our creator and sustainer.

In naming these times, we desire to give and receive love more honestly and to abide with you fully.

Graft us into you.

Shape us and transform us

inspire in us new growth within and towards flourishing production that reflects your abundant life and love. Amen.

Adapted from Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Easter 5 2021, p.156 and Spill The Beans, Issue 38, Resources for Easter 5 2021, p.131

Assurance

Beloved community, you are forgiven and have nothing to fear.

In the words of 1 John 4:18,

“There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear...”

Go now in love, forgiven and fearless.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Easter 5 2021, p.156-7

Listening for God's Voice

Reading: 1 John 4:7-21

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. ¹⁵God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. ¹⁷Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. ¹⁹We love because he first loved us. ²⁰Those who say, 'I love God', and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. ²¹The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Reading: John 15:1-8

[According to John's gospel, on the night before he died, Jesus washes his disciples' feet. Then he sits with them and this is part of what he said to them:]

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

For the Word of God in Scripture,
for the Word of God among us,
for the Word of God within us,
Thanks be to God!

Sing - The Anointing (Seasons 9-32)

We sing our prayer that we will be open to God speaking to us, open to God's wisdom amongst us.

*Lead us to listen,
to hear the heart speak.
O God in the quiet voice,
draw us to you.
Awaken our wisdom,
enlighten our vision.
Anoint us to heal
and to love as you do.*

May we be slow to judge,
may we learn to forgive.
Through compassion and kindness,
may we let others live.
Lead us to listen...

Give us faith that is strong,
give us hope that is bright.
May the small voice be our concern,
may we make burdens light.
Lead us to listen...

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Reflection

Let us pray...

*Lead us to listen,
to hear the heart speak.
O God in the quiet voice,
draw us to you.
Awaken our wisdom,
enlighten our vision.
Anoint us to heal
and to love as you do.*

In these weeks after Easter, after the celebration of the risen Christ, our readings invite us to consider the “so what?”

Is Jesus’ resurrection a once-off, perhaps even, an historical event that happened a long time ago and so sort of sits in the past alongside Christmas and other events described for us in the Scriptures?

Or is there something about this “event” that is more than just a story from the past?

Over the past few weeks, we have been reflecting on the encounters the disciples had with Jesus after they found the tomb empty.

Then last week, we turned our hearts towards who Jesus is - the Good Shepherd.

And today, “I am the true vine” (John 15:1).

In many ways, such a statement would have been confronting for the disciples.

Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, the vine is an image for the nation of Israel.

What does Jesus mean when he says *he* is the true vine, and that God is the vine-grower, the farmer, or the gardener, and that we are the branches (John 15:1,5)?

There is also an element here, perhaps for our ears a little obscure, of Jesus taking the place of Israel as the source of identity. Rather than Israel being the thing to which people belong or are part of, Jesus becomes that unifying presence, and the only membership requirement to this vine is to abide in him (15:4).

Where does your heart, your mind, your spirit, abide?

The writer of 1 John expresses it another way, inviting us to abide in love, and in so doing, we abide in God and God abides in us (1 John 4:16). The reading from 1 John 4 is really an extended reflection on what it means to abide in Christ, to abide in God, to abide in love.

So I looked up the word “abide”...

In English, it has taken on a meaning more like “accept” or “tolerate”, in the sense of “I’ll abide by your decision”. Another meaning is something like “to endure, that is, “our memories will abide” - which is where we get the translation in some versions “to remain”. A little further down in the dictionary definition and I see the “archaic” meaning of abide is to “live” or “dwell” - now it begins to make sense.

The Greek word is *μείναι* (*meinae*) derived from *μένειν* (*menai*) - to continue, dwell, stay, remain, to be existent - and the tense is that unusual Greek tense that implies a continuing and not yet complete sense.

So what does it mean for us to continue, to dwell, to remain, to live, to exist in Jesus, in love, in God...?

Well the writer of 1 John, makes it clear that when we are deeply immersed in love of God, we will also be immersed in the love of our brothers and sisters, our siblings in Christ (1 John 4:20). The writer of 1 John also says that God’s love is revealed in Jesus, and amongst us, in the way we love one another.

And that in love, we find life (1 John 4:9).

So where does your heart, your mind, your spirit, abide?

Where does your heart, mind spirit, dwell?

If you are anything like me, we are easily distracted.

Sometimes we get caught up in things that seem to matter - but really don’t - and we end up treating one another not so well.

We convince ourselves that acquiring wealth and holding on to it matters.
We convince ourselves that holding on to the traditions of our ancestors matters.
We convince ourselves that for God to hear us, we have to sing the right songs, pray the right prayers, even wear the right clothes.
We convince ourselves that my agenda is far more important today than the cry of someone in need or pain.
We convince ourselves we are too old, too young, too busy, too unqualified to participate in the mission of God.
Or we just get caught up in our own lives that we fail to notice God prompting us to care for another.
And we convince ourselves that we need to keep ourselves safe, we need to protect what we have - even though we can't always identify what (or who) we are protecting it all from... We simply become fearful of difference or change. We begin to fear the gardener's pruning shears.
The writer of 1 John says,

¹⁸There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.

The gardener prunes - not because there is anything wrong with the plant, but because when the branches have produced fruit, they become worn and tired, and they are pruned so that new growth can emerge, and, in the case of a grape vine, pruning also encourages the roots to grow more deeply. Pruning has nothing to do with being punished and everything to do with encouraging a full harvest. In Jesus words in John 15, the word used for "pruning" and the word used for "cleansing" has the same root word. Like pruning, cleansing is not about punishment but about preparation, and realignment, about getting ready so that we can be all that we are created to be.

And then there are these two brief comments that seem to cause us so much grief. First about the branch that withers and gets thrown into the fire (15:6) - which let me say clearly is not about anyone being thrown into the fires of hell. Every gardener knows that when a branch has withered and died, for the sake of the whole plant, it has to be cut off - these days we would probably put it in the compost bin rather than burn it - but the point is still about preparing the plant to be its best.

And the second part is about asking whatever you wish and it will be done for you (15:7). Many of us know what it is to pray for something and it not be "done for you" - praying for healing from a particular ailment, praying for a particular relationship to be restored, praying for peace in the world. I think Jesus' words here are linked to what he says about abiding in him - that we become so immersed in the vine, that our prayer reflects what the vine needs - so not asking for whatever I want - but being immersed in Jesus so much that what I want is what Jesus wants, what I want is to know Love and to love deeply.

So when Jesus speaks about "bearing fruit" - what does that look like - for you, for the church?

It is certainly not about trying so hard out of our own resources to do and to be something we are not (like dear old Basil from our story).

It is about immersing ourselves in the one who lived, loved, died and lives again.

It is about immersing ourselves in the Source of all Love.

And then reflecting that Love to the world around us - trusting that, as we do, love, the reflection of God's love in the world, will blossom and grow.

Let us pray...

God of Love,
you call us to centre our being in you, in your love.
We get so distracted.
Help us today and in all our days to fold our focus, to shape our lives, to dwell in You.
And as we do, may we reflect your love in to the world around us in such a way that our
friends, our families, our neighbours will come to know the height, depth and breadth of
your love for them and for all the world. Amen.

Responding

Prayer for Others

Our prayers for the world, and for ourselves, today reflect on the words of the well-known hymn, Abide With Me.

This hymn, so often turned to when times are hard, turns the words of Jesus into a prayer that as we seek to live in God, so God will live in us...

Sing - Abide With Me (TIS 586)

Gardener of Life,
as we bring our prayers for the world,
we reflect on words many of us have sung often,
many of us know "off by heart",
a hymn that is often sung at our Anzac Day commemorations,
or when times are hard.

*Abide with me; fast falls the eventide:
the darkness deepens; Lord, with me abide:
when other helpers fail, and comforts flee,
help of the helpless, O abide with me.*

Faithful God, you remain with us when life is hard.
Help us to remain with those around us who are struggling,
to make that phone call, to send that card or letter,
to sit in the silence with someone whose heart is breaking.

*Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
earth's joys grow dim, it's glories pass away,
change and decay in all around I see:
O thou who changes not, abide with me.*

God of life, you invite us to remain with you,
to fix our eyes and hearts and minds on you,
to focus on your love and grace, your life and hope.
Be with us in our youth,
be with us in our middle age,
be with us as we grow old.
When changes in our world frighten us,
remind us that we are held in your embrace,
and give us courage to hold others in that same embrace of Love.

*I need thy presence every passing hour;
what but thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who like thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.*

Sustaining God, we know that we cannot live well when we separate ourselves from you.
Give us eyes to see and hearts to know of your presence with us.

Be with those who seek to be peacemakers in their homes, their neighbourhood, the world.

We pray especially for those who live in parts of the world where war and violence are a daily reality.

Today we continue to pray for the people impacted by the events at Bondi and in western Sydney. Comfort and hold them, we pray.

And help us to be bearers of your love and peace in the world we encounter.

*I fear no foe with thee at hand to bless;
ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if thou abide with me.*

Loving God, be with those who mourn and grieve -
people whose loved ones have died,
people who have lost their job and livelihood,
people who have lost homes and families and relationships,
people whose bodies can't do what they once could do.
May they know the deep peace that is found in you.

*Hold thou thy cross before my closing eyes;
shine through the gloom, and point me to the skies:
heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
in life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.*

God of grace,
may the cross of Jesus guide our living,
may we be prepared to give all of ourselves for the sake of another,
that in our life, our friends, our family, our community,
may see you and experience your life-transforming love.

As you abide in us, so may we remain in you.

As we abide in you, so may we know you abide in us. Amen.

*Words: Henry Francis Lyte
Public Domain*

Offering

This part of our service is not about the money.

It is about considering how we will respond to what we have seen and heard and experienced this morning, or perhaps throughout the week - how is God prompting you, nudging you, inspiring you - and what will you do about it?

Each one of us is precious.

Each one of us has something to offer in terms of resources - time, energy, skills, money.

How will you respond?

Divine Vine Grower, we give thanks for your perfect love.
Please accept the offering of our good fruit.
Form us and re-shape us so that we may bear more fruit
and, in so doing, glorify you. Amen.

Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Easter 5 2021, p.154

Sending

Sing - Highways and Byways (Seasons 6-18)

We go into the week ahead to live the love of Jesus in our lives.

*Go into the highways and byways,
far beyond the safe and secure.
Gather in the lost and the lonely,
listen to the cries of the poor.
Go up to the skyways and flyways,
paint a rainbow all across the sky.
Living out the love of Christ Jesus,
shining out God's glory in our lives.*

God, make us ready to follow,
ready to go wherever you say.
Guide us through all our tomorrows,
meeting the needs of every day.
Help us encourage each other,
striving for unity,
building a rainbow of different personalities.
Go into the highways and byways...

God, make us ready to listen,
ready to worship, ready to pray.
Make us a people of mission,
willing to hear your word and obey.
Help us to welcome the stranger,
reach out to others in need.
Make us a people of holy hospitality.
Go into the highways and byways...

God, make us ready to lead and
ready to shoulder some of the load.
Give us the courage we need and
faith to explore a different road.
Give us a spirit of service in our
communities.
Teach us to labour in love,
and live responsibly.
Go into the highways and byways...

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Sending and Blessing

As part of the living vine,
let us go from here to bear fruit in the name of the true vine, Jesus Christ.

And may you know the blessing of God
the life of God
the presence of God
with you always. Amen.

Liturgy drawn from:

Spill The Beans, Issue 38, Resources for Lent-Easter 2021
Seasons of the Spirit, Resources for Lent-Easter 2021

Rev Kath Merrifield
28 April 2024