

A prayer of adoration

True God, true vine,
strength of all our being,
giver of all good gifts,
healer of all that is broken:
we worship you;
we glorify you;
we rejoice in you,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

A prayer of praise and thanksgiving

Creator God,
in you we are all we need to be;
through you we grow into all that we long to be;
with you we bear fruits that can be used and shared and multiplied;
because of you our lives are rich and blessed and fruitful:
so we praise you in song and silence, today and every day.
Amen.

Reading: John Chapter 15 verses 1-8

When I was young, not many people drank wine. Those that did, drank a few brands like “Blue Nun”, a Liebfraumilch wine from Germany. There were other countries of origin of course, Italy and particularly France but they had not the popularity that they have now. Australian and New World wines grew in popularity during the 1980’s and with them different kind of varieties, those which previously had been the preserve of wine aficionados became more popular. Shiraz and Merlot became popular varieties of red, and Chardonnay white with others following on as fashion continued to move on. Nowadays, supermarket shelves are filled with a large variety of wines from all over the world – even the UK. It comes as a bit of a shock to learn that no less than 15.6 million bottles of wine were produced from vineyards in the UK in 2018. Most of these were white and sparkling wines -the grapes for these being more suited to the UK climate. But the use of grapes does not stop there. We have

the table grapes that form part of our 5 a day and traditionally were taken on a visit to someone in hospital. Then there are sultanas and raisins, both made from dried grape. Even the humble glass of Vimto has a large proportion of grape juice – although my suggestion that it could be used as a substitute Communion wine did not go down well with my supervisor when I was training for the Ministry!

Viticulture is still something that we are not that used to, although, as I have said, there are now vines in many counties in the UK, mainly in the South of England. We may have seen them overseas when on holiday, but they are not something that we regularly work with. Not so the people of 1st Century Palestine for whom wine was the staple drink with meals. The imagery of a vine would be very familiar to them. So when Jesus says, “I am the vine”, an image will immediately pop into their heads. They will also be familiar with the husbandry of vineyards, the pruning to enable more fruit to grow and the lopping off of dead branches. Like many of Jesus’ images it is one that has a number of layers and it is these that I would like to turn to in the next few minutes.

The first thing that I would point out is that the idea of the vineyard as an image was nothing new even then. Isaiah referred to Israel as God’s vineyard in Chapter 5 verses 1-7 but various prophets such as Ezekiel said that, despite God’s care, the vineyard had yielded bad grapes. The phrase “bearing fruit” was one that was in common currency, as it now is in relation to our response to God. Here, Jesus uses the image of the vineyard initially to show how he relates to the Father before widening it to our relationship. God is the vineyard owner who tends to the vines, pruning them and caring for them. It is interesting that the words for pruning and cleansing are related in the Greek. So as God cleanses us through the Word, we are invited to abide in Christ.

This word abiding is very important is at the very core of this image. The disciples, (and we too) become branches that are part of the vine that is Jesus – the branches abide in Jesus the true vine. In abiding in Jesus, the vine image gives us the next thing which is this. The branches all rely on the vine. You cannot have a branch that exists all on its own. The branch receives all its nutrients from the vine and ultimately its roots. The vine feeds it so that it can produce the grapes. So, if Jesus is the vine, it follows that abiding in Jesus

means that we rely on Jesus to be fed. Of course the feeding in this case is spiritual nourishment – feeding with the holy Spirit and with the Word of God. We are fed with the example of Jesus and his teaching. All this feeding takes place as we are part of the vine – as we abide in Jesus and in his love. We also find that as we abide in Jesus, so he and his word abide in us and guide us.

And so we move on to the final point. The whole purpose of a vine is to bear fruit. We have already learned that the dead branches are lopped off by the owner as he tends to the vineyard. The expectation is that the live branches will produce bunches of live grapes. Depending on the type of vine, the bunch of grapes might end up being taken to a sick patient. It might end up in a bottle of red wine or it might be dried and used in sultanas and find its way into a scone. In the same way, as we are the branches we bear fruit as we are fed by and abide in Jesus. These fruits are the works of love that are inspired by abiding in Jesus. As Jesus envisaged a community of love where people cared for one another, so this is brought about by the fruits that come from being a branch of the vine. Jesus declares the ultimate manifestation of this – that he would lay down his life for his friends – those whom he loved.

It's worth finally noting that, as there are many different types of grapes that are put to a lot of different uses – even wines can taste quite different from one another – so the fruits that we bear may be quite different from each other. We can show God's love in many ways. But yet there are common characteristics to all by which they can be recognised. In that respect, they are like the fruits of the spirit that Paul alludes to in Galatians, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law". It is these characteristics, alongside the works in response to God's love that are rooted in the vine that is Christ the Lord.

So let us seek to be branches of that vine that feeds us. Let us abide in Christ as that his word can abide in us so that the fruits of Christ can be seen in abundance in our lives.

Prayers of intercession

God of comfort,
as India faces the ravages of corona virus we pray for some relief for their suffering. May those in this world who have an excess of medicine and oxygen be moved to generosity and may those who face great anguish find some measure of comfort. Even as our situation with the virus changes here we are mindful of the many families across this country who are still trying to come to terms with the death of a loved one. We pray for everyone struggling with the pain of loss. Bring solace to them, bring people who can offer words and actions that sooth, and help all those who grieve to find small shoots of hope for the future.

God of comfort,
listen to our prayer.

God of justice,
it is with dismay that we read that Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe faces a further year in imprisonment. Thank you for those who are working for justice and trying to gain her freedom, please give them energy and focus as they try to deal with the next phase of this complex case. We pray also for Nazanin's family, her husband Richard and daughter Gabriella. It's very difficult to imagine what they are experiencing but we ask for your mercy, peace and love to surround and support them.

God of justice,
listen to our prayer.

God of truth,
the recent tension in parliament and the complications around truth and honesty can be difficult for us to process. We pray for a spirit of openness and fairness for those elected to govern us. Renew their vision for their role in society and bring people into the centre of government who have a spirit of service and integrity. Help those who make decisions to see the true plight of

the poorest and most disadvantage in our society and look for that will bring about deep and lasting change.

God of truth,
listen to our prayer.

God of community,
we acknowledge the wide variety of feelings within our local communities prompted by the change to the lock down. From those who are exhilarated by trips to the hairdressers or the pub, to some who remain anxious about the possibility of a new surge, may we find understanding and empathy for one another. Give us all the ability to think in terms of the whole community not just about ourselves and help us to keep our eyes wide open to truly see how those around us are coping as things change.

God of community,
listen to our prayer.

God of hope,
as the spring days bring new hopefulness may we not forget those for whom this past year has been particularly devastating. Thank you for the work the church has undertaken in order to feed, comfort and intercede for those in need, but give us the patience and endurance needed to continue the work. Prevent us from becoming fatigued or bored by the endless cycle of need we have to respond to, rather reenergise us. Inspire and envision us for new ways we can bring the kingdom of heaven to earth and hope to the people in it.

God of hope,
listen to our prayer.

God of compassion,
with the summer term in motion and children enjoying being back in school we are particularly mindful of those in year 11 and year 13. Many are facing multiple tests and assessments unsure about what results will form their final grades. As they struggle to revise, fill the gaps they have missed, and reconcile their damaged school experience may they be confident they will get the grades they deserve. Bring calmness to this final part of the school year and

some sense of closure as many of them transition to new stages of life and learning.

We are equally conscious of the university students continuing to learn remotely until May. Please guard their mental health. Guard them against disappointment and despair and help the institutions they are part of to find meaningful ways for them to connect with one another and engage with the subjects are studying.

God of compassion,
listen to our prayer.

God of love,
thank you that we are all connected to you our true vine. When we feel disconnected from our communities, families or even ourselves help us to picture this image of the vine and feel rooted in you and your comfort, justice, truth, community, hope and compassion.

God of love,
listen to our prayer. Amen.

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