

## 24<sup>th</sup> January 2021 – Morning Service

Christian Unity

Rev Chris Watson

### Call to Worship

There is one body, and one Spirit, one hope to which God has called us: one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all.

### StF 690 – The Church's one foundation

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| 1) The church's one foundation<br>Is Jesus Christ her Lord;<br>She is his new creation<br>By water and the word;<br>From heaven he came and sought her<br>To be his holy bride;<br>With his own blood he bought her,<br>And for her life he died.       | 3) In toil and tribulation,<br>And tumult of her war,<br>She waits the consummation<br>Of peace for evermore;<br>Till with the vision glorious<br>Her longing eyes are blest,<br>At last the Church victorious<br>Shall be the Church at rest.           |
| 2) Called out from every nation,<br>Yet one through all the earth,<br>Her charter of salvation<br>One Lord, one faith, one birth;<br>One holy name she blesses,<br>And shares one holy food,<br>And to one hope she presses<br>With every grace endued. | 4) Yet she on earth has union<br>With God the Three in One,<br>And mystic sweet communion<br>With those whose rest is won.<br>O happy ones and holy!<br>Lord, give us grace that we,<br>With them, the meek and lowly,<br>In heaven your face shall see. |

*Samuel John Stone CCL No. 515642*

### Prayers

God of love, through Christ you said to us: "You did not choose me but I chose you." You seek us, you invite us to receive your friendship and abide in it. Teach us to respond more deeply to this invitation, and grow in a life that is ever more complete.

God of life, you call us to be praise in the midst of the world and to welcome one another as a gift of your grace. May your loving gaze, which rests upon each person, open us to receive each other just as we are.

God you who gather, you knit us together as one vine in your Son Jesus. May your loving Spirit abide in us wherever we are, whatever our circumstances. Help us to celebrate all you are with joy. Help us to celebrate that we are all members of your body.

God of the one vineyard, you call us to abide in your love in all we do and say. Touched by your goodness, grant us to be a reflection of that love in our homes and churches. Help us to bring your peace, your compassion, your empathy into our homes. Teach us how to love.

Very often we think of prayer as something we do, an activity of our own. In this short time we are invited to an interior silence, and to turn aside from all the noise and concerns of our lives and thoughts. In this silence the action belongs to God. We are simply called to abide and rest in God's love. **Amen**

## The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name; thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the  
glory for ever and ever. **Amen.**

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,  
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are  
yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

## Reading: John 15:1-17 The vine and the branches

'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.

'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: love each other.

## Song – Bind us together

*Ch) Bind us together, Lord, bind us together  
With cords that cannot be broken  
Bind us together Lord, bind us together  
O bind us together with love*

1) There is only one God  
There is only one King  
There is only one Body  
That is why we sing

2) Made for the glory of God  
Purchased by His precious Son  
Born with the right to be clean  
For Jesus the victory has won

3) You are the family of God  
You are the promise divine  
You are God's chosen desire  
You are the glorious new wine

## Reflection

This week is the week of prayer for Christian unity and it rightly focuses on the unity of the universal church, that is the visible and tangible part of Christ's body. People often ask why are there so many different denominations. 1 Corinthians chapter 12 answers this in part, as the human body is made up of different parts all with their own role to play so the church is made up of different people and denominations all with their own role.

What binds us together is that we are all under the same head or rooted in the same vine.  
Jesus said 'I am the vine you are the branches'

In the book of Exodus God calls Moses to go to his people and Moses asked God for a name that he could say when he was asked who sent him, the answer was I am who I am. In John's Gospel this idea is taken forward and Jesus makes various claims about himself as 'I am'. As God, He said

I am the Good Shepherd

I am the gate for the sheep

I am the true vine

I am the bread of life

I am the way, the truth and the life

I am the resurrection and the life

He also said 'I am the vine you are the branches'

In our reading Jesus said I am the true vine. In the Old Testament, Israel, the people of God are likened to a vine. It was their role to represent God to the world around them. Israel was the means by which God revealed himself to the surrounding nations, it was through their laws, customs and behaviours that God could be seen by others. In Jeremiah 2(21) Gods says to the Jews "I planted you as a choice vine from the purest stock. How then did you become degenerate and become a wild vine?" Jesus is saying that he is the true vine, the true representative of God, the one through whom God will show himself. Through him we can know/ see the character and nature of God.

Jesus says he is the vine itself from which the branches come. Jesus talked about situations and metaphors which his listeners would easily understand, he used everyday things to illustrate his teaching. As the people were familiar with sheep and shepherds so they would know about vines, about vineyards and wine presses. Now I'm no gardener but I do know that it is the vine stock itself which is important. The vine stock comes out of the ground and the branches come from that. In pruning it is the branches that are pruned, the branches are totally dependant on the stock, they can no longer live or bear fruit without a vital connection between stem and branch. The vine itself though can live without the branches and will grow new ones to replace ones lost.

Jesus is the vine, we are the branches.

So if we are the branches we are pruned to become healthy branches, we are pruned to bear fruit. It would be easy to speculate on what pruning means, is it any hardship or challenge that can make us better people? Is it in circumstance, the loss of a job, bereavement, illness any kind of struggle, is that why at times life never seems easy? Does God allow it, impose it or work through it? What is the fruit, is it bringing other people to know God, is it the fruits of the Spirit, love joy peace etc. We, like the branches are dependant on the vine, we can not live without being sustained by the stock. It is like any electrical equipment, unless it is plugged into an electricity supply it is useless, an electric lamp, a heater, won't work unless it is plugged in and switched on, in the same way we as Christians are dependant on Jesus. We need him for life and growth, we need the nourishment he offers, nourishment that comes through worship, that comes through teaching, that comes through prayer, that comes through pursuing knowledge of God and his ways. Without all of these we become dry and brittle.

Jesus is the vine we are the branches

A vine or indeed any plant has more than one branch. A tree has many branches the older the tree the more the branches criss cross, supporting each others weight, forming a canopy giving the whole strength to withstand bad weather. The Christian life isn't something you do on your own but it is one to be lived in a community , it is not something we do alone. We are all branches coming from the vine and together we are part of the foliage. We are the branches and as such the Church, Christ's body, is made up of many branches all sustaining each other, enabling each other to grow through fellowship and love. As individual branches we need to be rooted in the vine, as the body of Christ, we need to be rooted in the vine. Perhaps as a people of God, as individuals pruning needs to be done. As God is the good shepherd caring for his sheep, so he is the gardener lovingly tending his plants.

Jesus is the vine we are the branches

Vines are not free standing but need support on which to grow, a vine needs wires, a trellis of some kind to hold its weight. That is what the church structures are for, that is what the buildings are for. That is the business of the church meeting, church councils, of the pastoral visitors, of the Ministers, they are there to help us grow as branches, to help us grow as the vine to enables us to bear fruit.

Without our normal structures we have to rely on each other. As we grow and mature we become closer together we realise that we are one in Jesus in the vine and through this others will see the love of Jesus because as our next hymn says we can only stand in him.

### **StF 351 – In Christ alone**

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| <p>1) In Christ alone my hope is found,<br/>He is my light, my strength, my song;<br/>This Cornerstone, this solid Ground,<br/>Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.<br/>What heights of love, what depths of peace,<br/>When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!<br/>My Comforter, my All in All,<br/>Here in the love of Christ I stand.</p> <p>2) In Christ alone! who took on flesh,<br/>Fullness of God in helpless babe!<br/>The gift of love and righteousness,<br/>Scorned by the ones He came to save:<br/>Till on that cross as Jesus died,<br/>The wrath of God was satisfied -<br/>For every sin on Him was laid;<br/>Here in the death of Christ I live.</p> | <p>3) There in the ground His body lay,<br/>Light of the world by darkness slain:<br/>Then bursting forth in glorious Day<br/>Up from the grave He rose again!<br/>And as He stands in victory<br/>Sin's curse has lost its grip on me,<br/>For I am His and He is mine-<br/>Bought with the precious blood of Christ.</p> <p>4) No guilt in life, no fear in death,<br/>This is the power of Christ in me;<br/>From life's first cry to final breath,<br/>Jesus commands my destiny.<br/>No power of hell, no scheme of man,<br/>Can ever pluck me from His hand;<br/>Till He returns or calls me home,<br/>Here in the power of Christ I'll stand!</p> |
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## **Prayers of Intercession**

God of life, you have created every human being in your image and likeness. We sing your praise for the gift of our many cultures, expressions of faith, traditions and ethnicities. Grant us the courage always to stand against injustice and hatred based on race, class, gender, religion, and fear of those not like ourselves.

**God of peace, God of love, in you is our hope!**

Merciful God, you have shown us in Christ that we are one in you. Teach us to use this gift in the world so that believers of all faiths in every country may be able to listen to each other and live in peace.

**God of peace, God of love, in you is our hope!**

O Jesus, you came into the world and shared fully in our humanity. You know the hardships of life for people who suffer in so many different ways. May the Spirit of compassion move us to share our time, life and goods with all those in need.

**God of peace, God of love, in you is our hope!**

Holy Spirit, you hear the fury of your wounded creation and the cries of those already suffering from climate change. Guide us toward new behaviours. May we learn to live in harmony as part of your creation.

**God of peace, God of love, in you is our hope!**

**Amen**

## **StF 487 – You shall go out with joy**

You shall go out with joy  
And be led forth with peace,  
And the mountains and the hills  
Shall break forth before you.  
There'll be shouts of joy  
And the trees of the field  
Shall clap, shall clap their hands

And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,  
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,  
And the trees of the field shall clap their hands,  
And you'll go out with joy.

*Stuart Dauermann & Steffi Geiser Rubin © 1975 Lillenas Publishing Company CCL No. 515642*

## **Blessing**

To the one whose goodness is without equal, whose love is beyond comparison, whose mercy is beyond understanding, and whose power is beyond words, be praise and glory, worship and thanksgiving, now and always. **Amen**

*\*Some words are from the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity website*