

SA, SL, TS and DSM United Churches

Rural Life Sunday – April 28th, 2024

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Prelude: – Christie Coatsworth

Welcome & Announcements:

Good morning! Thank you for your support of all our services, which are posted on our websites - Southbuxton.ca and Talbotstreet.ca .

Thank you to Christie Coatsworth for our music this morning. Thank you to Tracey Major for putting together the Power Point slides.

Lighting of the Christ Candle:

Call to Worship:

Eric: As we gather, in this season of new life, may our ears be opened to receive holy dialogue.

People: **As we pause from our busy lives of readying the fields and gardens, may our words be inspired in holy dialogue.**

Eric: As we seek God's wisdom and God's blessings on all "seeds", may God interweave our presence and words to create holy dialogue.

People: **In this time of worship, let us engage in holy dialogue, as children of God seeking to learn, seeking to teach, seeking to be one.**

Eric: Come let us worship the one we seek.

Opening Hymn: "For the Beauty of the Earth"

For the beauty of the earth,
for the beauty of the skies,
for the love which from our birth
over and around us lies,
 God of all, to thee we raise
 this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the beauty of each hour
of the day and of the night,
hill and vale, and tree and flower,
sun and moon, and stars of light,
 God of all, to you we raise
 this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the joy of human love,
brother, sister, parent, child,
friends on earth, and friends above,

for all gentle thoughts and mild,
God of all, to you we raise
this our hymn of grateful praise.

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.

Children's Story:

Children's Hymn: "Jesus Love Me, This I Know"

Responsive Psalm: Psalm 22: 25 – 31

When your people meet, you will fill my heart with your praises, Lord, and everyone will see me keep my promises to you.

The poor will eat and be full, and all who worship you will be thankful and live in hope.

Everyone on this earth will remember you, Lord.

People all over the world will turn and worship you, because you are in control, the ruler of all nations.

All who are rich and have more than enough will bow down to you, Lord.

Even those who are dying and almost in the grave will come and bow down.

In the future, everyone will worship and learn about you, our Lord.

People not yet born will be told, "The Lord has saved us!"

Scripture: John 15: 1 - 8

Jesus said to his disciples: I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts away every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit. But he trims clean every branch that does produce fruit, so that it will produce even more fruit. You are already clean because of what I have said to you. Stay joined to me, and I will stay joined to you. Just as a branch cannot produce fruit unless it stays joined to the vine, you cannot produce fruit unless you stay joined to me. I am the vine, and you are the branches. If you stay joined to me, and I stay joined to you, then you will produce lots of fruit. But you cannot do anything without me. If you don't stay joined to me, you will be thrown away. You will be like dry branches that are gathered up and burned in a fire. Stay joined to me and let my teachings become part of you. Then you can pray for whatever you want, and your prayer will be answered. When you become fruitful disciples of mine, my Father will be honored.

Message: "I Am the True Vine!"

We as Rural folks especially here in Chatham – Kent are all about growing crops from seeds, or fruits from fruit trees, or cattle from calves, and the list goes on. It is usually in the spring of the year that all of this new life grows all around us. It starts with those hardy flowers, such as crocuses and daffodils. We see the wheat fields come alive with green new growth. We see the weeds growing in the worked up

fields. We start to turn the earth for our own vegetable garden. We head off to the local nursery for this year's additions to our flower gardens. Calves and lambs are being born in nearby barns and fields. New life is springing up all around us.

It is getting about the time that our fruit growers are pruning the trees to ensure great crop this summer. Wine growers are trimming the vines to ensure healthy and plentiful grapes for this fall's wine production. We as Christians know all of this new growth and continued growth, relies on God's blessings of rain and sunshine at the perfect times.

Is it much different for new growth in us? When we abide and trust in God, we grow in our faith in the love of God. We grow in relationship with one another and with God. We bear good fruit. Everything we do reveals the great fruit we share with those we meet – Christians or others.

Jesus says, "I am the vine. God is the gardener". To be in God's Garden we have to be connected to the vine. We receive our nourishment from the vine. We receive life from the vine. "When a branch is broken, that branch cannot produce grapes". "Stay connected to me", Jesus says, "Then you will produce good works because we are joined together". Staying connected to Jesus' teachings and words, until they become a part of you, helps us produce those good works. God will be pleased with you.

In John, Jesus shares many metaphors of who Jesus is in his statements of, "I am..." Last week Jesus shared with us he is the Great Shepherd. Today Jesus is the True Vine. Both of these images work for Rural folks, as we experience animals, trees and plants each day. Our children need our help to grow big and strong. We need help from our community partners to grow a big and strong community. It only takes one wolf or one loose horse to cause all kinds of havoc. That is true with our animals and crops and also in our communities.

Today's metaphor invites us to use our daily workings of cutting down and pruning vegetation to make them good and strong, to also look at our roles in examining the condition of our vineyard and how we might improve its health. I don't think this metaphor gives us the right to cut off those unproductive branches no matter how we might want to. But how might we help that unproductive branch become productive? In horticultural class in high school we learnt about grafting a branch from one fruit tree to another. Together the tree and the new branch produced lots of good fruit. Have you noticed the apple trees along Number 3 Highway and how short they are? That is a kind of hybriding that gives lots of

apples on short trees so they can be easily picked without a tall ladder or cherry picker.

In today's liturgy we shared abiding in God, and God abiding in us. This abiding is thick with significance. Much like the graft on the tree, when we abide in God, we are secure, deeply attached, close, loyal, and continue walking with God and doing God's work in our world. We are in this together yet with interdependence. This interdependence with the vine grower promises to be a relationship that will continuously shape, form, and re-form us.

As Easter people, we live both in the shadow of the cross and the light of the Resurrection. After Easter we try to work out, "How should we live as Christians?" or "How do we tell the story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection"? We might even wonder, "What is new life?" The easy answer to all of these questions is love. Love in God. God's love for us. Jesus' love for us in the cross, and Jesus strength and presence that abides in us in our daily lives – shaping and forming us to do great work! We are not alone. God is always with us. Thanks be to God.

Reflection Hymn: VU 520 "We Plough the Fields and Scatter"

- 1 We plough the fields and scatter
the good seed on the land,
but it is fed and watered
by your almighty hand;
you send the snow in winter,
the warmth to swell the grain,
the breezes and the sunshine,
and soft refreshing rain.

*All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above;
we thank you, God, O holy God,
for all your love.*

- 2 You only are the maker
of all things near and far;
you paint the wayside flower,
you light the evening star;
the winds and waves obey you,
by you the birds are fed;
much more to us, your children,
you give us daily bread.

*All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above;
we thank you, God, O holy God,*

for all your love.

- 3 We thank you then, O Maker,
for all things bright and good,
the seed-time and the harvest,
our life, our health, our food;
accept the gifts we offer
for all your love imparts,
and, what from us you long for,
our humble, thankful hearts.

*All good gifts around us
are sent from heaven above;
we thank you, God, O holy God,
for all your love.*

Invitation to Share Our Gifts:

Eric: Generous Giver of Life, we bring before you now the fruits of our lives. As a Rural Community in the season of new life, we understand the need to give - to plant the seed and receive the blessings of the harvest. Let us give in love.

Offertory: VU 540 “Grant Us, God, the Grace of Giving”

Grant us, God, the grace of giving,
with a spirit large and free,
that ourselves and all our living
we may offer faithfully.

Offertory Prayer:

People: In celebration and thankfulness for all we are given, we now give back to further your kingdom. In this season of new life, may our “seed” meet the basic needs of those in our community. May they nourish and strengthen our community, and be used to grow bigger gardens to feed your children yet to come. You are the vine, and we are the branches. Connected in love, may we share all that we have, in your holy name. Amen.

Chorus to Prayer: VU 665 “Pass Me Not, O Gentle Saviour”

Pass me not, O gentle Saviour, hear my humble cry;
while on others thou art calling, do not pass me by.
Saviour, Saviour, hear my humble cry;
while on others thou art calling, do not pass me by.

Pastoral Prayer:

Closing Hymn: VU 530 “All Beautiful the March of Days”

All beautiful the march of days,
as seasons come and go;

the hand that shaped the rose has wrought
the crystal of the snow,
has sent the silvery frost of heaven,
the flowing waters sealed,
and laid a silent loveliness
on hill and wood and field.

O'er white expanses sparkling pure
the radiant morns unfold;
the solemn splendours of the night
burn brighter through the cold;
life mounts in every throbbing vein,
love deepens round the hearth,
and clearer sounds the angel hymn,
good will to all on earth.

O God, from whose unfathomed law
the year in beauty flows,
yourself the vision passing by
in crystal and in rose;
day unto day declare thro' speech,
and night to night proclaim
in everchanging words of light
the wonder of your name.

Blessing:

Eric: May the road rise up to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face,
May the rains fall soft upon your fields
And until we meet again
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.

Closing Chorus: "Go Now In Peace"

Go now in peace, never be afraid.
God will go with you each hour of ev'ry day.
Go now in faith, steadfast, strong and true.
Know He will guide you in all you do.

Go now in love, and show you believe.
Reach out to others, so all the world can see.
God will be there, watching from above.
Go now in peace, in faith, and in love.
Amen, Amen, Amen.

Postlude: – Christie Coatsworth

Prayers: - Please include these people in your prayers this week.