

Worship at Home led by Mary Winchcombe 8th October 2023

Call to Worship

Loving God, we draw near to you
trusting not in any goodness of our own,
but in your grace and love,
your unfailing, overflowing mercy.
Open our hearts to all you say,
and our lives to all you would do,
by your grace and to your glory. **Amen**

STF 293 All heaven declares.

All heaven declares
the glory of the risen Lord
Who can compare
with the beauty of the Lord?
Forever He will be
The Lamb upon the throne
I gladly bow the knee
And worship Him alone.

I will proclaim
the glory of the risen Lord
Who once was slain
to reconcile man to God
For ever You will be
The Lamb upon the throne
I gladly bow my knee
And worship You alone.

Forever You will be
The Lamb upon the throne
I gladly bow my knee
And worship You alone.

Prayer of Adoration and Confession

Lord Jesus Christ, as we come to worship,
give us a sense of awe and wonder, an
awareness of the privilege we have in knowing
you, receiving your Spirit and being called
your people.

Grant us a glimpse of your glory that brings
home to us your greatness and goodness,
care and compassion, purpose and pardon –
a foretaste that fills us with joy and causes us
to be amazed and thankful.

We know that we are not perfect, that we stray
from the path that you would have us tread.
Forgive us Lord.
In Jesus name **Amen**

Bible readings:

Isaiah 5: 1-7

Matthew 21: 33-46

Reflection

Both of our readings tell stories of vineyards. In those days grapes were grown for wine, wine was an important crop, ranking alongside oil; vineyards were often family concerns. Once the grapes reached a reasonable size the family members would take it in turns to watch over the vineyard from the watchtower, until it was time for harvest. A good crop was important. Vines I'm told are a demanding harvest - to get good fruit demands a lot of work.

In our Isaiah reading a man builds a vineyard; he does all he can to make it as good as it can be. He chooses a fertile hillside, digs the soil, clears the stones, plants the finest vines, builds a watchtower and digs a press for treading the grapes. He then surrounds it all with a wall and hedges to keep out wild animals but despite all this the grapes are sour. He is so disappointed he abandons it to the elements and wild animals.

As in all parables, there is an underlying meaning. Here God is the owner of the vineyard and the vineyard represents the land of Israel; the grapes are the people of Israel who have let Him down so often by turning Him away.

He asks the people to judge between Him and his vineyard. Was there anything he failed to do? Why did it fail? He knows he has done all he could possibly do. By abandoning the vineyard, he is showing them that they too are doomed. This reading symbolises failure to live up to God's expectation. It has no happy ending.

The parable of the vineyard in Matthew's gospel is different – Jesus tells of a landowner who leaves tenants in charge, which was quite a common practice at the time. There would have been an arrangement that when the grapes were harvested the owner would collect his share of the crop. The grapes are good, but when he sends his servants to collect his share they are seized; some are beaten some are killed. The tenants even kill the owner's son.

In this parable the owner is God; the vineyard is Israel, but the tenants are not the people of Israel, but their religious leaders.

The servants sent to collect the owner's share are the prophets repeatedly rejected in the past, and the son is Jesus. It's a story full of depth, sorrow and power.

When Jesus told this parable, opposition to Him from the Chief Priests and Pharisees was gathering momentum and He was committed to driving home a message to the religious leaders who were questioning his authority.

He had come to Jerusalem to confront them with God's demand for Israel to be what it was called to be – the light of God's world. It's the story of how Israel through its representatives is going to refuse the demand and will end up killing God's son.

Jesus asks the religious leaders to predict what the owner will do to the tenants. They describe the tenants as wretches who will get a wretched end, and the vineyards will be given to other tenants. Do they realise they are talking about themselves that they are the wretched ones?

Through history they had rejected the calls of the prophets to turn back to God and now his son is rejected too. They may have kept the strict religious rules, but they have hardened their hearts to God and failed to recognise the Messiah.

And what of us in today's vineyard? We are the fruit in the vineyard. The question is 'Are we good fruit?' Is God's kingdom the most important thing in our lives? Do we have other kingdoms in our hearts? Maybe Pride, self-righteousness, wilfulness, selfishness, self-sufficiency? They all ring bells for me - hopefully not all together!

No-one, not even the most devoted of Christians can reach total perfection in this lifetime. We are works in progress. God is simply looking for us to co-operate in his perfecting process so that we will become the people he wants us to be in this life and beyond.

Christ's work on earth is continued through us. It is our great commission to tell the world about Him, share his love with them,

be sweet fruit in his vineyard through his grace and love and with him beside on our journey.

Amen

Prayers for others

Gracious God we bring to you our broken world, so full of injustice and exploitation, suffering and sorrow, hatred and division. We pray for all who work for change; all who strive to bring help and healing, hope and wholeness.

Loving God bring healing and renewal; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

StF 477 Teach me to dance.

Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart
Teach me to move in the power of your Spirit
Teach me to walk in the light of your presence
Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.

Teach me to love with your heart of compassion

Teach me to trust in the word of your promise
Teach me to hope in the day of your coming.
Teach me to dance to the beat of your heart.

You wrote the rhythm of life
Created heaven and earth;
In you is joy without measure.
So, like a child in your sight,
I dance to see your delight,
For I was made for your pleasure.
pleasure.

Let all my movements express
A heart that loves to say 'yes',
A will that leaps to obey you.
Let all my energy blaze
To see the joy in your face
Let my whole being praise you,
praise you.

The Lord's Prayer – Our Father

Blessing

Lord send us out in your name to serve the world and to love our neighbour as ourselves. Send us out in faith and hope that we may be channels of your grace to all.

Amen