

This, and all other Broadway “virtual services” since Easter, are available online at <https://urcwalsall.uk/virtual-church.html> .



Service for the 17th Sunday after Trinity, 4th October 2020

A warm welcome to all who share in worship with us today.

CALL TO WORSHIP

God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – calls us to set our sights on the goal of following and living in the way of Christ.

God calls us to follow, now!

Amen.

HYMN: Jesus, the very thought of thee

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.*

1 Jesus, the very thought of thee
with sweetness fills the breast;
but sweeter far thy face to see,
and in thy presence rest.

3 But what to those who find? Ah, this
nor tongue nor pen can show;
the love of Jesus, what it is,
none but his loved ones know.

2 O hope of every contrite heart,
O joy of all the meek,
to those who fall, how kind thou art!
How good to those who seek!

4 Jesus, our only joy be thou,
as thou our prize wilt be;
Jesus, be thou our glory now,
and through eternity.

Latin, 12 cent, *tr* Edward Caswall

PRAYERS

Let us pray.

A PRAYER OF PRAISE AND THANKSGIVING

Lord God, we are all so different, each our own being, and yet you nurture and protect us. How can we not be thankful to you for all that the journey with you offers?

We thank you that you guide us, in unexpected ways to the right way in life.

We thank you that when we wander, you draw us back to you.

Give us new direction and encourage us to follow where you lead.

We thank you that you know our individual needs and quirks and yearn for us to be on the journey of life with you.

We thank you that the pains of life can be overshadowed by the joy of walking with you.

For all the blessing and more, we give you thanks and praise.

Amen.

A PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of the journey of life, the mystery of our very being, we confess that the journey we take gets disrupted and we get side tracked.

We go off on a wild goose chase that leads us nowhere and into barren places.

We find our way back to you in sorrow for our feelings and in penitence for our wandering.

May we be enriched by your welcome, relieved by your forgiveness and comforted by your all-embracing 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.

SCRIPTURE READING

St Matthew 21: 33-46 *The Parable of the Tenants*

³³ "Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. ³⁴ When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

³⁵ "The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. ³⁶ Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. ³⁷ Last of all, he sent his son to them. 'They will respect my son,' he said.

³⁸ "But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, 'This is the heir. Come, let's kill him and take his inheritance.' ³⁹ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

⁴⁰ "Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"

⁴¹ "He will bring those wretches to a wretched end," they replied, "and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time."

⁴² Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures:

"The stone the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;
the Lord has done this,
and it is marvellous in our eyes?"

⁴³ “Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. ⁴⁴ Anyone who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; anyone on whom it falls will be crushed.”

⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard Jesus’ parables, they knew he was talking about them. ⁴⁶ They looked for a way to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowd because the people held that he was a prophet.

Thanks be to God.

REFLECTION: *Mrs Christine Dixon*

Our Gospel reading today carries on from last week where we heard about the religious leaders in the temple who were trying to trick Jesus into giving them an answer that would condemn him. They failed in this attempt. In fact, Jesus had turned the tables on them by putting them in the same position that they had put him in. Obviously, this angered them.

In our reading today we hear that Jesus is again in the Temple, and again he is addressing the religious leaders. He tells a parable knowing that the leaders would recognise themselves in it. The moment Jesus spoke about a vineyard, the Pharisees would have recognised the connection with the vineyard spoken about by Isaiah so many years before. They would know that Jesus was referring to the nation of Israel.

Apparently, it was at the festival of Sukkuth, which recalls the wilderness wandering of the Hebrew people, and the grape harvest. Scholars believe that it was at this festival that the prophet Isaiah stood to offer his prophecy - The Song of the Vineyard. Here are those words:

“Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved about his vineyard.

My beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill.

He dug it up, gathered out its stones, planted it with the choicest vine.

Built a tower in its midst and cut out a winepress therein.

He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes”.

“Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah,

Please judge between me and my vineyard.

What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?

Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes

Did it yield wild grapes?”

“Now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard.

I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up.

I will lay it a wasteland. It won’t be pruned nor hoed,

But it will grow briars and thorns.

I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it.”

“For the vineyards of Yahweh of Armies is the house of Israel,

And the men of Judah his pleasant plant:

And he looked for justice, but behold, oppression.

For righteousness, but behold, a cry of distress.” (Isaiah 5: 1-7)

In Isaiah's time, things seemed to have settled down in Israel: the people were reasonably prosperous and at ease. However, what was not so obvious were the injustices, corruption, violence and deceit that were lurking behind the scenes.

At the festival, Isaiah began by reminding the people of all the good things God had done for all his people. God had saved them from slavery in Egypt, brought them through the wilderness, fed them manna and produced water from a rock. He delivered them into the Promised Land. All he asked in return was that they worshipped only him and that they kept his commandments. Isaiah pointed out that they should be celebrating what God had done for them.

The people should have paid heed to what they were there to celebrate, but they had forgotten that God was kind and merciful to them and that they should be kind and merciful to others.

The conclusion of the Song of the Vineyard makes hard reading. What God spoke through the prophet came to pass. God lifted his protective hand, and the land of Israel was laid to waste.

Returning now to our gospel reading, we can of course see similarities in the parable of the Wicked Tenants to Isaiah. Again, it is God who has planted his people as a vineyard. This time, though, the vineyard owner goes away and leases it to others. God still expects his rent — the fruit. Unlike in the Isaiah reading, this vineyard produces good fruit; the problem is that the leaseholders won't hand it over. There is nothing wrong with the people of God; it is their leaders who are keeping them from God's kingdom.

In this gospel there is a less despairing approach than the one in Isaiah. Back then, God was ready to break up the whole of Israel. Here he is optimistic about the people, and ready to be inclusive in who can enter the kingdom.

Remember in last week's gospel we heard that Jesus said to the Pharisees "I tell you this: tax gatherers and prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you." The kingdom of God will be given to a people who will produce its fruit. This time it is different because God has sent his son, Jesus.

The Reverend David Sellery tells us that through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we are that people. He does remind us though not to feel smug and that we could use a "reality check". He says...

"How have we tended the vineyards of the Lord? What fruit have we produced? We are not in his vineyard to sun ourselves. We are here to make a difference. That's our job. That's what God expects of us. And that means actively witnessing Christ's love in the world... in kindness, in generosity, in forgiveness, in testimony... in all fruitful ways that share God's grace with everyone we meet. That's our part in the covenant that we have with the Creator."

Amen.

HYMN: Lord, speak to me

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.*

1 Lord, speak to me, that I may speak
in living echoes of your tone;
as thou hast sought, so let me seek
thy erring children lost and lone.

2 O teach me, Lord, that I may teach
the precious things thou dost impart;
and wing my words, that they may reach
the hidden depths of many a heart.

3 O lead me, Lord, that I may lead
the wandering and the wavering feet;
O feed me, Lord, that I may feed
the hungry ones with manna sweet.

4 O fill me with thy fullness, Lord,
until my very heart o'erflow
in kindling thought and glowing word
thy love to tell, thy praise to show.

5 O use me, Lord, use even me,
just as thou wilt, and when and where;
until thy blessed face I see,
thy rest, thy joy, thy glory share.

Frances Havergal

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Let us pray

God of one and God of all, we pray...

For those who don't know who they are, who cannot understand themselves or their place
in society;

God of all, **we pray for them.**

For those who don't fit in, who are or seem to be different;

God of all, **we pray for them.**

For those who don't know where they come from, their heritage or home, their family or
blood line;

God of all, **we pray for them.**

For those who wish they were someone else, or in some other place;

God of all, **we pray for them.**

In your great mercy, Lord, hear our prayers and grant sure journeys for all.

Amen.

HYMN: O Jesus, I have promised

*If you would like to **sing** this hymn, click the icon on the webpage for organ accompaniment.*

1 O Jesus, I have promised
to serve thee to the end;
be thou for ever near me,
my Master and my friend.
I shall not fear the battle
if thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if thou wilt be my guide.

2 O let me feel thee near me;
the world is ever near,
I see the sights that dazzle,
the tempting sounds I hear;
my foes are ever near me,
around me and within;
but Jesus, draw thou nearer,
and shield my soul from sin.

3 O let me hear thee speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will.
O speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
O speak, and make me listen,
thou guardian of my soul.

4 O Jesus, thou hast promised,
to all who follow thee,
that where thou art in glory
there shall thy servant be.
O guide me, call me, draw me,
uphold me to the end;
O give me grace to follow,
my Saviour and my Friend.

J E Bode

BLESSING

May God who plants vineyards call you to work for justice and righteousness.

May God who offers new life sustain you as you work for justice and righteousness,
and may you be blessed in the knowledge that you are a child of God.

Amen.