

This short act of worship has been produced for you by the Revd Dr Kathleen Richardson.

If you are well enough and able, why not spend a few moments with God, perhaps at a time when you would normally be sharing with others in church and pray for them as they pray for you.

A warm welcome to each of you, on this first Sunday of October. We offer God this time, our hearts and our lives, as we come together to worship him.

Call to Worship

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

HYMN: Singing the Faith 255

a hymn about the kingdom of God

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqCOggQhFyo>

The kingdom of God is justice and joy,
for Jesus restores what sin would destroy;
God's power and glory in Jesus we know,
and here and hereafter the kingdom shall grow.

The kingdom of God is mercy and grace,
the prisoners are freed, the sinners find place,
the outcast are welcomed God's banquet to share,
and hope is awakened in place of despair.

The kingdom of God is challenge and choice,
believe the good news, repent and rejoice!
His love for us sinners brought Christ to his cross,
our crisis of judgement for gain or for loss.

God's kingdom is come, the gift and the goal,
in Jesus begun, in heaven made whole;
the heirs of the kingdom shall answer his call,
and all things cry glory to God all in all!

We use the reading from the Hebrew Scriptures to lead us into prayer

READING: Isaiah 5:1-3

Let me sing for my beloved my love-song concerning his vineyard.

My beloved had a vineyard on a very fertile hill. He dug it and cleared it of stones, and planted it with the choicest of vines; he built a watchtower in the midst of it, and hewed out a wine vat in it; he expected it to yield grapes

PRAYER OF ADORATION

Gracious God, you have created this earth with its beauty and mystery. You ordered its seasons and created a climate in which life flourished.

You created male and female in your image, to be guardians and gardeners, to be your agents for productivity and the keepers of your will.

You have invited us into your secrets of generosity and power and encouraged us to watch over each other in love.

All you ask from us in response to your gift of life is to produce fruit which is worthy of your love.

READING: Isaiah 5: 3-7

...but it yielded wild grapes.

*And now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and people of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard. What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it?
When I expected it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?*

And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard. I will remove its hedge, and it shall be devoured; I will break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will make it a waste; it shall not be pruned or hoed, and it shall be overgrown with

briers and thorns; I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel, and the people of Judah are his pleasant planting; he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry!

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

Merciful God, we confess that we have not been true to your purpose for us.

We have spoiled your creation and neglected our stewardship.

We have not lived in reverence, compassion and mercy.

We have followed too easily the desires of our own sinfulness and have not yielded the fruit of your asking.

We have forfeited the right to your trust and love.

Forgive us, hear and heal us that we may again grow true to your intention and live to your praise and glory.

ASSURANCE OF FORGIVENESS

God is love.

Know that your sins are forgiven through Jesus Christ our Saviour and rejoice in God's goodness and grace. **Amen**

READING: Matthew 21:33-46

Jesus said "Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country. When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce. But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another and stoned another.

Again, he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way.

Finally, he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son'. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance'. So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.

Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?

They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time".

Jesus said to them, "Have you never read the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'? Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom. The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls.

When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realised that he was speaking about them. They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

REFLECTION

By this time in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus is in Jerusalem. He had entered the city and been greeted as a prophet, he had gone into the Temple and caused somewhat of a disturbance and the chief priests and elders were openly questioning his authority in the temple courts, and secretly plotting to kill him.

Jesus takes up the theme from Isaiah's vision. And he tells another parable. Unlike Isaiah's story, in this picture of the vineyard as God's kingdom, the problem is not that the fruit is scarce or sour, but that those put in charge are not good stewards. They produce no fruit for the owner. Three times

they refuse his request, and meet his messengers with violence and death.

On one level the parable is addressing the question of who are the tenants given the responsibility for the vineyard's productivity, and also who is Jesus and what authority does he hold. The parable suggests that the chief priests and the elders were given the responsibility for God's kingdom and have failed in their task, and that Jesus is the owner's son who will be killed by the tenants, who think that by doing this, the vineyard will become theirs. The chief priests and elders think that if Jesus is removed, the old leadership will regain control.

But when Jesus finishes the parable, he poses the question to the crowds – 'What will the owner do?' The answer of course is not what the chief priests want to hear – the owner will take the vineyard away from the tenants – the chief priests and the elders - and will find new tenants who will give him the fruit.

But then Jesus takes it to a new level through a sort of word play. In Hebrew the word for son is *ben* and for stone *eben*. He quotes from Psalm 118 about the rejected *stone* becoming the foundation stone for a new household of God's people, the true Kingdom of God. The new Kingdom will be built on the dying and rising of the Son of God.

And I want to go back to that question of Jesus at the end of the parable – 'When the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do?' Well, the owner of the vineyard is God and God's mercy and grace are more profound than human thought can fathom – and to those who will plot to kill his son, and to those who stand by and do nothing to prevent it, the Father offers forgiveness and reinstatement as tenants of his new Kingdom.

Here we have an insight into the Christian church emerging from within the life of the Jewish people, the fulfilment of the hopes of the Hebrew scriptures through commandments and prophesies and history. The Kingdom may be given to new tenants but they too will be expected to produce fruit that will please the owner.

And as generations pass and the vineyard changes hands, perhaps it's good to remind ourselves that we also are tenants not owners of God's church. The care of God's world and kingdom are our responsibility, and the test of our stewardship will be how carefully we exercise it.

Leadership in the church is tending the vines and encouraging the new growth, caring for God's people and creation, calling attention to inequalities, and exercising justice. This is no less true of the church in this current crisis. What will be the fruit we can offer to God from the care we are exercising over the

scattered congregations and dispersed communities? What are the new fruits we are seeing as the old vines are pruned back?

The other reading offered in the lectionary for today is part of the letter Paul wrote to the Christians at Philippi. He sets out all the things that make him a good and pious Jew, that might qualify him for being a leader in the church, then writes, 'whatever gains I had, I have come to regard as loss ... that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith In Christ. I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.'

Thanks be to God.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

Prepared by Helen Lunn

God, planter, carer and nourisher of the vineyard:
we are the vines,
lovingly cared for to produce fruit:
the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience;
kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness
and self-control,
fruit that is lacking in so many parts of your world.

We pray for families the world over where love is in short supply.

(Silence).

God of the vineyard,

help us to cultivate that fruit.

We pray for those people whose lives are devoid of joy.

(Silence).

God of the vineyard,

help us to cultivate that fruit.

We pray for countries of the world where peace is a pipe dream.

(Silence).

God of the vineyard,

help us to cultivate that fruit.

We pray for relationships where there is an absence of patience.

(Silence).

God of the vineyard,

help us to cultivate that fruit.

We pray for all those who make the world a better place through acts of kindness.

(Silence).

God of the vineyard,

help us to cultivate that fruit.

We give thanks for the generosity of all who give their lives for your kingdom.

(Silence).

God of the vineyard,

help us to cultivate that fruit.

We pray that you will increase our faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

(Silence).

God of the vineyard,

help us to cultivate that fruit.

God of the vineyard,

hear our prayer for we ask it in the name of Christ.

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**

HYMN: Singing the Faith 682

Sing / read / pray / proclaim the words or listen to it here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u9rWrw3XBO8>

God of grace and God of glory,

on your people pour your power;

crown your ancient Church's story;

bring her bud to glorious flower.

Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,

for the facing of this hour.

Heal your children's warring madness;
bend our pride to your control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness,
rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
lest we miss your kingdom's goal

Lo, the hosts of evil round us
scorn your Christ, assail his ways!
Fears and doubts too long have bound us;
free our hearts to work and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
for the living of these days.

BLESSING

The order of the world is shaped by the dying and rising of
Christ.

With him, ours is the Kingdom, the power and the glory for
ever.

AMEN