

St David's with St Michael's and All Angels, Mount Dinham, Exeter

Newsletter for 2 May 2021 – The Fifth Sunday of Easter

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our newsletter for the Fifth Sunday of Easter. Jesus encourages his followers to think of themselves as abiding in him. As the branches of a vine are nourished by the roots so when we abide in Jesus we become fruitful for his glory and for the good of our neighbours.

Thank you to everyone who came along to our Annual Parish Meeting (APCM) and to Glynis Harflett who was re-elected as Churchwarden and Stephanie Aplin who was re-elected as Chapel Warden at St Michael's. We want to consider how we can best support them in their roles. Thank you also to Emma White as she stands down as Churchwarden after four years of service and we give thanks for her new role with YMCA Europe. Thank you also to those who are serving on our PCC in the coming year. We still have a vacancy for a Deanery Synod representative from St David's. Please have a word with myself or Ash if you are interested. Significant decisions are likely to come before Synod in the coming year or two so it is important that our congregations are represented.

Our services today are:

9.30am Parish Communion at St David's (live streamed) with Celebrant, Nigel Guthrie, and preacher, Belinda Speed-Andrews

11am Mass at St Michael's with celebrant and preacher, Nigel Guthrie

4pm Thrive

Will look at Sainthood and what it means to be a saint. Please join us for questions and discussion.

Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88685738289?pwd=WEh1dlNCY3NRQTlCcXFjK2ZlejR0UT09>

Meeting ID: 886 8573 8289

Passcode: 159821

Services in church and online this week

Tuesday 4 May, 9.30am Zoom Morning Prayer (from Common Worship). Please join us using this code <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6602261392?pwd=VzdOaU1XUFBjWk9jV0xvMDZWajZBQT09>

Meeting ID: 660 226 1392

Passcode: 196651

Wednesday 5 May, 9.30am at St Michael's Mattins followed by 10am Mass in church
(also live streamed on St Michael's Facebook page)

Thursday 6 May, 9.30am, Morning Prayer, on St David's Facebook Page
10.30 Holy Communion at St David's in church

Thursday 6 May, 6pm Sung Vespers at St Michael's Church (public worship)

Friday 7 May, 9.30am, Morning Prayer, on St David's Facebook Page

Sunday 9 May

9.30am Parish Communion at St David's with celebrant, Belinda Speed-Andrews and preacher, Nigel Guthrie

11am Mass with Rogation Prayers at St Michael's with celebrant and preacher Nigel Guthrie

4pm Thrive

Join Zoom Meeting:

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Covid-19 Safe for Public Worship

Please avoid touching door handles – Thank you.

Hand sanitizer must be used on entering and leaving church.

Please wear a face covering in church unless you are exempt.

At St David's we are encouraging people to wear face coverings to come forward to receive Holy Communion and then to consume the host after moving away from the altar rail.

At St Michael's the priest will distribute Holy Communion to people in their seats.

Seating will be distanced to approximately 2 metres. Please sit on the seats where service books are placed. Seating is also marked by white labels at St Michael's.

Services should be 'no longer than necessary'; and congregational singing is still not permitted indoors.

Toilet facilities will be available and please follow the instructions for use.

Please avoid mingling inside church before or after services.

Please do not attend church if you are feeling ill or are shielding. Although we will do all we can to make the church safe you attend at your own risk.

Living in Love and Faith

I would like to invite you to explore and discuss these new resources from the Church of England which are billed as 'Christian Teaching and learning about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage'.

We have now planned two parish groups starting in May to study the material together. We are holding a Tuesday afternoon group starting at 2pm and a Tuesday evening group starting at 7.30pm. The dates are as follows: 11 May, 18th May, 25th May, 8th June and 15th June. It would have been lovely to hold these in person but given the current restrictions they will have to be on Zoom and the links will be published in the weekly notices. Because the sessions touch on sensitive material we need to restrict the size of each group to 12 so that we can work in sub-groups of no more than 6. The study course is based on videos which include personal stories and there is time for discussion and sharing of thoughts and feelings about the topics. Each session should last no more than 90 minutes. So please join us if you can and let me know nigel.guthrie1@gmail.com if you would like to join the afternoon meetings or Belinda bspeedandrews@gmail.com if you would like join the evening meetings. There will be some modest initial 'homework' required.

All those taking part will be invited to make their responses to the Church of England as the House of Bishops will be considering their approach to these matters during 2022. All the material can be found online by searching for 'Living in Love and Faith' and accessed free through the LLF learning hub. This is a very significant consultation for the Church of England and for many people within it so please join one of our groups if you can.

Christian Aid Week

Once again this year we will be holding **Christian Aid Week online Big Breakfast**. As we still can't hold live events this will be on Zoom on Saturday 15th May at 9.30am. Do join in, if you can, and, make a donation to Christian Aid so that we can

continue to support their work in fighting poverty and injustice. I will publish a Zoom link in the weekly notices beforehand.

Or if you are feeling energetic...there will also be an **Exeter Canal Walk** on the same day, 15 May starting at 11am. All ages and abilities are welcome and you set your own target and walk or cycle. Registration and route details are available from Mary Ellis on 01392 273456 or maryellis@phonecoop.coop
All funds raised will support Exeter's Christian Aid Week Appeal.

Food for vulnerable people

It is not clear when or how our soup evening might return and we are in conversation with St Petrock's about what practical ministry we might be able to take on. Please keep this process in your prayers as we look for the best way to serve our community in these times of change.

Traidcraft Stall & St Michael's Bountiful Table

We have restarted our regular stalls but please be careful to maintain social distancing and just approach the stalls one at a time. Thank you for your support.

Men's Breakfast

We plan to hold the next Men's Breakfast on Saturday May 29th. It may be by Zoom or in person so please watch this space!

Parish Magazine – New Leaves

The Magazines for May are now available in church and online with a great range of articles. Thank you to all our contributors and editors.

Green Team

Thank you to everyone who contributes to the paper recycling scheme at St Michael's Church and to John Darch who organises the collection.

The Green Team met recently and are planning a morning focussed on the environment, with lunch of locally sourced food, for 11th September 2021. Please keep the date!

Cleaning at St Michael's Church

We would love to recruit some more volunteers to help clean at St Michael's Church, especially in the Chancel and Lady Chapel. Cleaners usually go in every other week and Elizabeth Hughes is usually in church once a fortnight on a Tuesday morning. We would also like to arrange an occasional cleaning party but this will have to wait until restrictions loosen. Please have a word with Stephanie Aplin or Elizabeth Hughes if you would be able to help. Thank you.

Phone Networks

Many of you have appreciated phone calls from other members of the church community. If you would like to be phoned by someone and haven't had any contact, or would just like to talk, please let me know at nigel.guthrie1@gmail.com or by ringing me on 01392 660226 or Ash on 07855305519.

Your Prayers are asked for...

Please remember those who have died recently including:

Frederick Stapley

In the **Parish Cycle of Prayer** we pray for The Listeners (Samaritans training initiative for Exeter Prison inmates); all staff and prisoners at Exeter prison; the families of prisoners, the Prison Chaplaincy team

Please also pray for:

our Government, to reconsider the cuts in aid which will adversely affect many people in need of medical care and clean water supplies

the work of Christian Aid;

those working in care homes, hospitals and hospices - giving thanks for their commitment and courage;

those who were injured, bereaved or killed in the Lag B'Omer Festival in Israel;

those whose lives have been devastated by the volcanic eruption in St Vincent;

those suffering from Covid around the world, especially in India and Brazil;

Please give thank for:

the vaccination programme in this country and praying for the equitable distribution of vaccine throughout the world and the Covax programme;

the rain which has fallen this week, helping crops and gardens;

May God bless you and those you care for,

Nigel Guthrie

Prayers, Readings and Address for The Fifth Sunday of Easter, 2 May 2021

Collect

Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: grant that, as by your grace going before us

you put into our minds good desires,

so by your continual help we may bring them to good effect;

through Jesus Christ our risen Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

First Reading – Acts 8: 26-end

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over to this chariot and join it.’ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ He replied, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

‘Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.’

The eunuch asked Philip, ‘About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ Then Philip began to speak, and starting with

this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, 'Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?' He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Gospel Reading - John 15: 1-8

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

Address from Belinda Speed-Andrews, 2 May 2021

Now many of you may not know me very well, but one person who does know me, knows that Belinda and plants/gardening do not go together. I am though a very obedient daughter and when asked to cut back a particularly vicious pyracantha whose thorns would constantly stab one in the back when sitting outside on the garden bench, I duly did as I was asked. Like my hair, I have been known to go bald and so when Mum came back from the shops it was to the horrors of my pruning and not only a bald pyracantha but a very bald beloved plant that my late Father had bought my mother when they first moved into this particular house! As you can imagine I have never been able to live that one down and perhaps quite rightly so. But then Jesus talks about pruning and cutting off dead wood so maybe I wasn't so careless after all. I shall leave that to you green fingered among us here this morning to decide!!

So let us then take a look at John 15: 1-8. This is the final of John's I AM sayings of which there are 7 in total. I am the bread of life, I am the gate, I am the way, the truth

& the life, I am the resurrection and the life, I am the good shepherd, I am the light of the world & finally in today's reading I am the true vine. I have never found John's Gospel the easiest of the Gospels to read and yet for me it contains some of the most beautiful Bible verses imaginable.

The passage this morning is part of Jesus' final discourse; Jesus knows he is going away, he knows he is going to die and this is his final chat with his friends. And to do this he uses the image of the vine, something, that although they were predominantly fishermen, would have recognised, they were familiar with the image of the vine, used in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament the image of the vine was used to portray the relationship between God & Israel. Jesus knew they would be alright, but he knew they needed to give them words of comfort & encouragement. 'You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.' All you need to do is, 'abide in me as I abide in you'.

But why the imagery of the vine, what is it representing here in this context? I want to suggest that Jesus is using the vine to talk about community. Jesus is giving the disciples instructions about creating and sustaining the community of his disciples, that he believes can continue to live in his love and the love of his Father, by abiding in him, in spite of the persecution they will all face.

The image of the vine as a community though poses challenges for the disciples in their fear, confusion & loss. And so likewise for us as a community. If we at St David's embraced this model of community what would that possibly look like? I want to suggest three things.

A community that is a vine is one of interrelationship, mutuality & indwelling. To get an idea of what this looks like, branches on a vine are almost indistinguishable from one another, unable to know where one branch stops and the next one starts. Can you see a join between a branch and the trunk of a tree? The branches, us the disciples, all grow out of the central vine, Jesus. That is what it means to be baptised. This then suggests that there are no free-standing individuals in a community but that each one is rooted in Jesus and so embraces the other in pain & in joy; therefore no individual status. This is challenging in a culture where individualism is the ultimate goal, self-sufficiency, success for me at all costs, I am the best. We are called to be a community of steadfastness in our relationship with Jesus and to bear fruit. What is that fruit? Fruit is to act in love, love for the community, an act of love shaped by Jesus. It is a community not built by individual accomplishments, choices or rights but by corporate accountability to the abiding presence of Jesus and the corporate

enactment of love of God & Jesus. I would want to say that this is a picture of St David's in the love & care it has shown for one another over the last 18 months. It takes time & effort and sometimes a lot of hard work to do this and you have.

Secondly, the metaphor of the vine suggests a non-hierarchical community. That in itself is a challenge for the Church as it has been and still is incredibly hierarchical. There should be no branch with pride of place over any other and the pruning and cutting away of dead wood underpins this idea. The only difference visible is the fruitfulness of the branches and it is the farmer, God, who makes those decisions not the community to enhance fruitfulness where he will. This should challenge us because in the fourth gospel there is only one measure of one's place in the community of the faithful and that is, to love Jesus as he has loved us, nothing more nothing less. This suggests that any decisions of power & governance in the community are made in the radical egalitarian love of the vine image. This is harder to achieve as our structures currently are not made for this, but it doesn't mean we can't as a community strive to be more egalitarian in our thinking, decision making and worshipping as we look to re-build our future together.

And finally the image of the vine is anonymous. One branch lacks any true distinction in appearance from another, in character or gift. And so this image of the vine is brought into sharp relief when compared with Paul in his well-known verses in 1 Corinthians 12 and his description of us all being a part of the body of Christ, where each part is distinct, where one part cannot survive without the other. But here in John's gospel the image of the vine does not give us distinct roles. Unlike John's gospel, Paul does not remove our distinctiveness but locates each of us within the body of Christ; each needed one for another, but the fruit we bear is distinct. For John though the image of the vine undercuts celebration of individual gifts and again this challenges us the Church in the understanding of today's culture where celebrity status, individualism and self-expression are top of the agenda. This too is a challenge for each of us as we are all individuals with our own gifting. I share this very short teaching to help think about this aspect of community: There is a story of a Jewish Rabbi who asked those he taught how they knew the night had become day. One said it was when he could see the shape in the distance was either a dog or a sheep, another said it was when he could see all the lines on the palm of his hand and another said it was when he could see the leaves of the tree in front and know which tree it was. But the Rabbi answered "It is when you can look into the face of any man

or woman and know that they are your true brother or sister, until you can do that it is
".still night

So what about us here in our parish? I would want to say that perhaps this last year has been a time of pruning in one or another for everyone and now as we come back together and look to recover & rebuild our communities, now is the time as Howard said a couple of weeks ago in his sermon, a time to think about what it is we as a community can let go of, the dead wood, & to look at where we can prune to encourage new growth & to do this as a community.

Earlier this week I tuned into a podcast with Archbishop Stephen Cottrell and Bishop Emma Ineson talking about the new vision for the Church of England in the 2020's. I can hear an inward sigh as you all think yet another new initiative, a new programme, money spent and nothing changing. I was encouraged though in the simplicity of the message and for me it reminded me of the image of the vine; a church centred on Christ, that is simpler, humbler and bolder where each branch abides in the vine to receive the gift of Jesus' love and to bear fruit so long as we, his disciples remain with Jesus.

Closing Prayer and Blessing

Eternal God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life:
grant us to walk in his way,
to rejoice in his truth,
and to share his risen life;
who is alive and reigns, now and for ever.

The God of peace, who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
that great shepherd of the sheep,
through the blood of the eternal covenant,
make you perfect in every good work to do his will,
working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight;
and the blessing of God almighty, the Father,
the Son and the Holy Spirit be upon us and remain
with us always. **Amen.**

Do join us next week for our services in church and online!

