

## Short sermon at 8am Holy Communion – 29<sup>th</sup> April 2018

Gospel: John 15: 1 – 8.

In the gospel reading we heard the words of Jesus in Saint John's gospel. We were given a strong image: of Jesus as the true vine, and we are all branches in that vine.

As we are linked into the vine of Jesus we gain the strength to love, and we bear fruit. God's love flows through his people. With all our failures and fragilities in life - we can bear fruit which brings God's blessings into the world. We bear fruit by staying connected to Jesus – abiding in him. How does this happen?

One way is through prayer and worship.

It has been said that the church exists to worship God in Jesus Christ. Here the church means the Christian community and its organisation, not only the building. In other words, worship is at the heart of what we do and who we are as Christian people and community. It's been said that worship shows God to us and us to God. It is the opportunity for us intentionally to be in the presence of God and to receive from God; worship is a way into the peace and the love that we don't always remember is God's promise and blessing for us. To re-activate the good news about Jesus in us. Therefore worship always has the potential to change us – to transform us. We hear something new which leads us to know ourselves and our focus in life differently; to change how we act and relate to others.

Jesus said “abide – remain- in me as I abide in you”. Worship is that conscious work of being in the presence and love of God in Jesus.

But also let's not think that worship is all about our own sense of well-being. Worship enables us to bear fruit in acts of love – it helps us – or it should if it's good - to be inspired and empowered by the Spirit; released from our self-concerns to act in compassion and love.

Next month all Christians and churches are invited by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York to take part in a focussed 11 days of prayer under the title of “Thy Kingdom Come”. I've written more fully about it in the May parish magazine. We are asked to pledge to pray specifically for people to come to know Jesus Christ and have faith in God for themselves. The focus is rightly on prayer to God, which recognises that it is God, the Holy Spirit, working in our lives, and the lives of others, who makes the difference. The familiar line from the Lord's Prayer – “Thy Kingdom Come” - is a prayer placing our trust in God, opening ourselves to letting God change us, those around us, and the world.

To take part in these days of prayer yourself – between 10<sup>th</sup> May (Ascension Day) and 20<sup>th</sup> May (Pentecost) you can find lots of material on a special website – there are daily readings and prayers available there – or you can pick up a booklet in church next Sunday of daily readings and prayers for the 11 days which will also

include Christian Aid Week themes; called “God’s Kingdom is Stronger than Storms”.

Last week we had a very positive visit to the church of members of the Diocesan Advisory Committee. They are the committee which reviews and approves or otherwise any changes to the church building. They came to meet with us and our project architect to review the plans for CC2020 – our vision to re-vitalise the church building as a community church for the future. They will be meeting as a full committee to look at our plans during May too – on May 15<sup>th</sup>. Let us be praying that they will truly understand the vision and the plan to realise it, and give the right support.

Our vision for Community Church 2020 is also part of our calling to enable people of all needs and backgrounds in our community to find their way into worship of God which connects with them, and so help them to explore and grow their faith in Jesus Christ. That is why we want to make this church building more open, more available, more inspiring for everyone as a holy place; and to achieve that vision by making the building more welcoming, more flexible in use, and more accessible.

Both this national initiative of Thy Kingdom Come, and our own local project of CC2020 come from a conviction which is also rooted in this gospel message about God’s love and blessings flowing through us and bearing fruit when we are connected to Jesus. It is that conviction that when we gather for worship the church community we are here not for ourselves alone – we have another purpose for being the church and worshipping God. We are here for our families, we are here for our neighbours, we are here for our businesses and our organisations; we are here for our town, we are here for our country, we are here for the plants and animals and ecosystems of this planet, we are here for the world; and we are here for the future – the love we share as we become one in God through Jesus Christ, is for all of these – that everyone may know the good news about Jesus , God's love and promises of peace and joy which is the birth right of us all.