

**North West Wiltshire Pastorate**  
**Worship for May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2021**

We begin our service today with the hymn *Lord, for the years*:  
<https://youtu.be/RkkYUEcN234>

Good morning and welcome to worship today.

Our opening hymn, has I hope, reminded us of the faithful God who has led His people throughout history, through good times, through times of trial and testing, the same God who makes and keeps His promises to be with us always.

So we come together in worship,

Let us pray,

*Eternal God,*

*we are gathered from different place –  
called and welcomed by name.*

*We are anchored by you,*

*source, guide and goal,*

*you reach out to us,*

*and in turn we reach out to one another;*

*from your core*

*we learn strength and we find the grace to grow,*

*the fruit of our faith is found when we know ourselves*

*to be at the heart of our communities,*

*living out the gospel by our words and actions,*

*radical – resilient – reliable;*

*as you expect us to be.*

*And always rooted,*

*understanding where we come from,*

*happy and open to wherever we need to be in the future.*

*Eternal God,*

*We confess we do not always 'get it right,'  
sometimes we see no need to be rooted,  
instead embracing what we believe to be freedom,  
only to find it something quite different.*

*Sometimes we resist change  
and say it is because we see no point to it,  
when the truth reveals we are comfortable as things are.*

*We resist your roots and try to plant our own,  
only to find without your grounding – we have nothing.*

*Reconnect us,*

*Re-root us,*

*Revive us,*

*Amen.*

I could never be described as a girly-girl, I'm not a fan of the colour pink in any shade and activities like ballet lessons were never for me. Dresses were strictly for Church, although I confess that changed as I grew up.

It could be said that whilst not a rebel, I was always a non-conformist! A memory I'd like to share of when I lived in college in Aber. Each of the kitchens had a toaster, and periodically the fuse in the plug would go. When this happened the Hall President would return the toaster to the shop where the long-suffering sale assistant would replace it.

And then I became Hall president!

The inevitable happened.

My predecessor knocked on my door to tell me one of the rugby lads had reported the toaster was not working, he held out a replacement receipt, I went to the wardrobe, pulled out a small bag of DIY materials

that my Dad had put together for me and handed him a Phillips screwdriver and a fuse.

He looked blank.

I told him to get on with it and change the fuse in the plug.

He told me he didn't know how.

So I did it, and made him watch so he'd know what to do in the future.

I removed the fuse, put in a new one, checked and re-connected the wires and put the plug back together, and the toaster was as good as ever.

Today we are thinking about the theme of *staying connected* but we can only stay connected if we have been connected in the first place.

And we cannot assume that is the case for everyone –

**Our readings are from John's gospel, chapter 15, verses 1-8 and from the Book of Acts, chapter 8, verses 26-40**

### **Being and staying connected**

Where to begin?

The idea of connection is very clear in the gospel, clear but also somewhat brutal.

We can sign up quite happily to Jesus as the true vine but the idea of God as the gardener brutally cutting off the branches that yield nothing has always made me uneasy. Those branches may not yield anything now but they did in the past. Does their remaining on the vine drain it of what it needs to survive? Surely there could be another way? It seems there is as abrupt a dismissal of the human branch that yields nothing as the branch itself, albeit that the human branch at least does not get cast into the fire and burnt.

Yet, this is a different approach to the other *ego emi* passages, its darkness possibly reflecting where Jesus was in his ministry, time was running out and like everything from chapter 13 onwards what is said is done with one eye on the future.

There is also a dispute running parallel to this which involves hostility from the local Synagogue towards the followers of Jesus which has left them feeling vulnerable. The emphasis on remaining, abiding, staying goes back to the very beginning of the gospel and speaks of the greater love found in the new commandment that sustains disciples in adversity, like branches nurtured from the core of the vine itself.

Therefore anything that lessens the flow of sustaining grace is going to be a problem.

Is that still so dark?

Let's think about our reading from Acts.

The Ethiopian eunuch was a man of importance and influence in his own court but had been badly treated in Jerusalem, treated badly and banned from the Temple.

But he wanted to learn.

He was regarded as an outcast, the word was not for him.

But he wanted to learn.

He was intrigued by the image found in Isaiah, but intrigue didn't come with an explanation.

And he wanted to learn.

Philip was led to him, but he was also led to Philip. The knowledge and teaching Philip shared with him was returned to Philip to help with his understanding of what life was like for someone else ...

In so doing they made a connection and that connection was bound forever by the Baptism that followed.

The Ethiopian had opened his mind, Philip had opened his heart.

The old barriers were tumbling, new connections were being made, new communities of faith being formed.

We are connected to each other by faith, through the communities in which we live, we have connections because of shared experience, culture, history, but we have wider connections, global connections and recognising and maintaining those require a greater effort.

We are connected globally to our brothers and sisters in India – their need of us is great at this time.

We are connected globally to our brothers and sisters in the occupied territories – their need of our help and support is growing not lessening. We are connected globally to our brothers and sisters who are suffering the effects of climate change – much of which the is the fault of many so called first world countries.

We are all connected – we may need to consider re-connecting – in order to stay connected.

Amen.

We listen to our second hymn which comes from the Iona tradition,  
*Heaven shall not wait:*

<https://youtu.be/FHMt3YJHbZE>

### **Prayers of Intercession**

This is a reflective prayer, based on our gospel reading which comes from ROOTS, the Lectionary resource.

*Let us pray,*

*I am the vine.*

*I am your origin, your nutrients, your mainstay.*

*Root yourself in me.  
Let yourself be fed.  
Let yourself grow ... closer and deeper.  
And in the growing ...allow the pruning.  
Allow me to prune, to trim, to cut away your broken branches,  
Your fruitless parts,  
Your strivings,  
Branches that are going to seed.  
And watch and wait.  
Wait for the new shoots.  
Wait for the new fruits to bud slowly ... and open gently.  
Turn to my warmth, and let your fruits open in my glory.  
Amen*

### **Blessing**

As this time together ends  
remain rooted in the God who called you,  
remain fruitful to the Son who loves you,  
remain nurtured by the Spirit who needs you.  
And let us all remain connected to one another  
until we can meet together once again.  
Amen.