



The Church of Scotland

Weekly Worship 2nd May 2021

Taking part in today's service is

Preacher: Stewart Cutler, St. Ninian's Stonehouse

Prayer 1: Kirsty Forsyth, candidate for Diaconal Ministry

Prayer 2: Mary Gargrave, Deacon, Glasgow Carnwadric

All-age: Ross Clark, Youth Worker, Dundee Fintry

With music from members Ferryhill Virtual Choir, Emu Music and Northern Baptist Association

Introduction – The Right Reverend Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly

Hi everybody and welcome to our worship service.

We are into May now and I know I've heard the old saying "Ne'er cast a clout 'til May's oot".

But I have to say today the sun is shining, the skies are blue, and it is very summerlike and I'm saying bring it on.

We've been looking forward to this kind of weather.

But the good news is this, that we have a God who is faithful through every season and regardless of circumstances yes, even including the weather.

So, we are thankful to God for his trustworthiness, for that faithfulness and that is why we worship.

That's why we gladly worship, acknowledging God, thanking God, praising God. shall we worship God together then.

Song 1 – Here in this place - Ferryhill Virtual Choir

Here in this place new light is streaming
Now is the darkness vanished away
See in this space our fears and our dreamings
Brought here to you in the light of this day

Gather us in, the lost and forsaken
Gather us in, the blind and the lame
Call to us now and we shall awaken
We shall arise at the sound of our name

We are the young, our lives are a mystery
We are the old who yearn for your face
We have been sung throughout all of history
Called to be light to the whole human race



Gather us in, the rich and the haughty
Gather us in, the proud and the strong
Give us a heart so meek and so lowly
Give us the courage to enter the song

Here we will take the wine and the water
Here we will take the bread of new birth
Here you shall call your sons and your daughters
Call us anew to be salt for the earth

Give us to drink the wine of compassion
Give us to eat the bread that is you
Nourish us well and teach us to fashion
Lives that are holy and hearts that are true

Not in the dark of buildings confining
Not in some heaven light years away
But here in this place the new light is shining
Now is the kingdom, now is the day

Gather us in and hold us forever
Gather us in and make us your own
Gather us in, all peoples together
Fire of love in our flesh and our bones

Prayer of Approach – Kirsty Forsyth

Living God, we come before you in prayer. We ask you to quieten the distracting noise of the world, that we can open our ears to hear you, our hearts to love you and praise you in this time of worship.

Creator God, we are in awe of the wonderful world you spoke into being. With its diversity, colour, complexity, and beauty. Nature helps many of us connect with you. For all the ways we know you are God, we thank and praise you.

You have formed us and made us in your image, we thank you for everyone gathered, all are precious to you. May we feel your Holy Spirit with us, guiding us and transforming us to be more like Christ.

Gracious God, we come as imperfect followers of Jesus, knowing some of the wrongs we have committed in passed days and aware we have become insensitive to others. Forgive us when we resist your pruning and turn from your guiding.

Faithful God, your word assures us that if we confess our sins to you, you will forgive us and make us clean. Thank you for your mercy and forgiveness.

Perfect Gardener, we ask you to help us to be the connected branches of your vine and bare your fruit.

And we say together the words that Jesus taught his disciples to say



Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come,
your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever,
Amen.

Scripture Reading – Stewart Cutler, St. Ninian’s Stonehouse

John 15:1-8

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes^[a] so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

All Age Talk – Ross Clark, Youth Worker, Dundee Fintry

Hi, my name is Ross Clark and I am the community worker at Fintry Parish Church in Dundee. This morning we are gonna be thinking about connecting. And so one of the most common ways that we connect is through these things, is through our smartphones. So our smartphones over the last year have been used more and more and more, there's 3.5 billion people across the world have got a smartphone, and the average person spends five hours a day using their smartphone, which is incredible. So that got me thinking, you know, what is the most important part of the phone? Is it the camera on the back so you're able to do video calls and take photos and do videos? Is that the most important part? Or is it the speaker so you could hear what the other person's saying, or you can hear music that's coming out of your speaker? Or it might be for other people, it might be the wifi button where you press it and you've got the whole world of the internet at your fingertips.

For me I think the most important part is this bit here, and that is the charging dock, because if we didn't have the charging dock, the whole phone would be very different. Because what would happen was you get your box, you'd open it, you'd be very excited, I've got my new phone, and then what would happen is after a couple of hours it would die and you can't use it anymore. But thankfully in the box that you get your new phone you also get one of these, you get a charging cable and you get plug. So what happens is when your phone runs out, we all know, you pop in here, you put it in the wall, leave it for a couple of hours and it charges and your phone is able to use its full potential again. So it's really important that we stay connected.



And you know, the chapter in the Bible we're gonna look at today is all about connecting, but not to phone, not to power source, but to God. In the chapter we're gonna look at today, which is John 15, which is found in the New Testament, Jesus ask us to connect with Him. What an amazing thought that is, let's just stop and think about this. So God who made the world, who made the seas, who put stars in the sky, who knows how many grains of sand are on every beach in the whole world wants to connect to you and to me. Is that not an amazing thought, the God to made seven billion people, all of us very, very different, no two people are exactly the same. He wants to connect with you and me, that's amazing and what an amazing thought.

We think that the people who make phones are really smart and they are, but they've only made a few models, but God has made seven billion, and no two of them are the same. Amazing, and He wants to connect with you. So connecting with God, in the verse in the chapter that's in the Bible that we're looking at today, Jesus says that if we do connect to Him, we will produce fruit. So what does that mean? Does that mean that raspberries grow out of our ears, and grapes come out of our nose, and strawberries will start to grow out of our toes? No, that will be ridiculous wouldn't it. But what does it mean to produce fruit that Jesus said, if we stay connected to Him? How could we produce fruit? The fruit that Jesus is talking about is the things that's important to Him, is loving people, is being faithful, is being full of joy, is being honest, is being kind. And the more we connect with God, the more we become like him and we're able to show the world these different things. Isn't that an amazing thought that we could show these things because we're connected to God, amazing. But you might think, that's fine, but what does it actually mean to be connected to God, and how do I connect with God? You know, there's a few ways, one of the most relevant ways is to read the Bible.

The Bible is God's Word, and the more we read the Bible, the more we get to know God, and the more we get to know God, the greater the connection that we have with Him. Another really important way is prayer. You know, if I've got my phone and I only connect it once a week, my phone is not gonna be very effective throughout the whole week, isn't it? Because what happen it will maybe die the next day, and then I just got this phone that's not really doing anything for the rest of the week. And you know, it's about like prayer, if we're only praying to God once a week, then the results, you know, maybe aren't going to be that great. But if we're talking to God every single day, we're connecting with God every day, we are gonna be far more like God. It's like if you met a new friend, if you just spoke to them once every six months, your relationship is not really gonna be that strong, but if you speak to them every single day, that relationship is gonna be strong. So it's really important that we speak to God and it's just like a conversation with a friend, and over time it might at the start feel a bit weird, but over time it becomes easier and easier and it becomes a real asset in your life. And the last thing is just even to listen to worship music, to hear other people praising God, and then be able to praise Him along with them. So they're just three example, there's loads more out there. So my challenge for this week is stay connected to God, you know, between reading your Bible, praying, listen to worship music, stay connected to God. And I can assure you if you're able to do that for a full week you'll begin to see a change in you, and you'll be a real blessing to everyone else.

So have a great week and enjoy staying connected to God. Take care.



Song 2 – I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say – Alanna Glover, Emu Music

I heard the voice of Jesus say
Come unto Me and rest
Lay down thou weary one
Lay down thy head upon My breast
I came to Jesus as I was
Weary and worn and sad
I found in Him a resting place
And He has made me glad

I heard the voice of Jesus say
Behold I freely give
The living water thirsty one
Stoop down and drink and live
I came to Jesus and I drank
Of that life giving stream
My thirst was quenched my soul revived
And now I live in Him

I heard the voice of Jesus say
I am this dark worlds Light
Look unto Me thy morn shall rise
And all thy day be bright
I looked to Jesus and I found
In Him my Star my Sun
And in that light of life I'll walk
Till travelling days are done

Sermon – Stewart Cutler, St. Ninian's Stonehouse

We can never go back to where we were before, but we tell ourselves all the time that we can, we want to get back to normal as soon as possible, but here's the thing, we've changed, all of us have changed. We've changed because we have all experienced a traumatic event, an event that continues around the world, an event that has changed all of us. And that's a similar context for today's passage from John's Gospel, the trauma of Jesus' trial and execution is just hours away and it will be awful both for Jesus and His friends. These are words of comfort for them, words for them to find hope in for the dark moments to come. Abide in me, I am the vine, stay connected to me, rooted in me, it's only in me that you will be fruitful. But the next few days of the story aren't the only ones that will be difficult for the disciples, they will face hardship and controversy, expulsion from the religious communities, difficult decisions, big calls on the way forward, persecution and even arrest and death. Things won't be easy for them just as they haven't been easy for any of us over the last months. The word we saw often used for getting back to normal is recovery, but we all know that while the recover might mean healing, it doesn't ever mean



that everything will be the same. We know that we might have scars, we might have different limited ability, we might have pain both physical and emotional, and we might have to change all kinds of things about our lives because of what has happened. At the very least, we will have the experience of living through the problem, the injury or the event, that changes us.

There's an old proverb that says, you can never stand in the same river twice, the water that you stood in the first time is gone, also the plants in the bank have grown, stones in the river bed have been worn over time. The change may be slow, but it's constant. As we are recovering the world changes around us, we age, we experience, we learn, and so does everyone else. A colleague of mine was always keen to remind us that not changing isn't an option because even if we stay the same, everything around us changes. So our place in the world has changed whether you want it to be or not. So when we use phrases like new normal, we're talking about that reality of what recovery really is, that we can never go back to the world as it was because that world doesn't exist anymore. There's a lot going on in today's passage in John's Gospel, It's the last of the 'I am' statements, I am the true vine. It's part of the long farewell discourse where Jesus tries to explain what is about to happen both to Him and to His disciples. So it's an intensely pastoral moment, but in the middle of all of that Jesus talks about something I think we find really difficult to get our heads around both in our own lives and in the life of the church. Fruitfulness, when Jesus speaks in this way, it seems clear that he's not just being pastoral, not only showing concern, He's also issuing a bit of a challenge. Remain fruitful, in fact be more fruitful despite all that's about to happen, actually because of all that's about to happen, remain in me and bear much fruit. We'll become almost immune to the litany of statistics that tell us what trouble the church is in, how many members have left this week, the point at which we just wouldn't be viable as a congregation or a denomination anymore. It's depressing, and so we just don't pay attention to it, and to a certain extent, the numbers are pointless. Numbers aren't everything we tell ourselves, fruitfulness is about more than counting heads. And yes, okay, that's true, there are many ways to be fruitful, but numbers are something. Pruning is about promoting a higher yield of fruit, branches that don't produce fruit are cut off and thrown in the fire because they use up the energy that could be going into growing good fruit, more fruit. Quality and quantity are both desirable and preferably both together, so why is it that we get so worried about conversations about fruitfulness? Is it because we feel the judgement is about us? What if the thing we need to stop, the branch we need to cut off, is ours. I mean, who wants to be thrown away or worse thrown in the fire? I don't want this thing that I've worked so hard for to be taken away. Oddly, we can be much more attached to that kind of idea than we are about doing some pruning in our own lives. We all know that there are bits of our lives that aren't what they should be, we could all be doing with a bit of gardening to get rid of the things that are unhelpful or take away our own attention and energy away from serving God as we know that we should. So why is it so different in a different context? Just three years before this conversation recorded in John's



Gospel, Jesus was alone as he set out in His ministry, He went to see John for baptism by Himself, he went out into the wilderness alone, and then when He was ready, He started to gather disciples, 12 of them. So sure numbers aren't everything, at least that's what we tell ourselves when they're low, but it's also true.

I visited Cuba some years ago and met a minister who with one member of his congregation each week met for worship for years because it was just too dangerous for other to join in. We might have closed that church saying it's unviable, that it hadn't grown, that had no plan for mission, but they met and they prayed for those who could not meet to pray. And people in that community knew that they were loved, knew that they were prayed for, and when the time came they were able to return. And when it was safe they did, they returned to what is now a thriving church. The fruits from those two faithful people is bountiful. What marks out the disciples is the fruitfulness, that's the evidence of their connection their dependence on Christ, they and we can do nothing without him as our root. If we're not bearing fruit then, surely we need to ask ourselves some serious questions about just how connected to Jesus we are. Here's the thing, we know what good fruit looks like, and we know what an empty branch looks like too. We know that some plants like the sun and others the shade, some like dry and others need damp conditions. The right kind of plant in the right place makes all the difference. Sometimes it's just that the plant needs more food or water or that the sun hasn't shone or it's shone too much, or that the fruit is spoiled because there were no workers to gather it in.

Our role in all of this I think is about discernment, working out prayerfully what God wants from us, finding out where God is at work in the world and joining in. After all Jesus tells us that God is the gardener, He's the one who does the pruning. Sometimes He needs us to help. Pruning is painful. Our church building has been closed since the first lockdown, and that's been hard on many people, but by being thrown into creating online services we've reached others who have never been in our church building or who can't ever get there. New growth, fruit from something that was painfully cut and one we would never have made willingly certainly makes you think, doesn't it? And one final thought, when we complain that others should mind their own business and tend to their own plants, we're failing to recognise that we're all part of the same vine rooted in Christ. We don't have separate vines, in fact vines only grow and bear fruit if they're grafted onto good roots.

So go and be fruitful, put all of your energy into the places that God is bringing growth, and don't be afraid to prune, to relocate even, but to always, always be grafted into the root that is Christ.

Prayer of Intercession - Mary Gargrave

God of compassion and grace, we come before you now with our prayers for others, for our world and for your church.

We bring our concerns to you for all who find themselves in a dark place today.



God of hope, we pray for our world, in every place and part which continues to struggle to deal with the affects of the COVID pandemic. We see signs of small victories and signs of hope, and we give you thanks for these. However, we recognise that what we are gaining has to be handled with care, and that we cannot take things for granted. Help us all to continue to play our part so that we will soon be in a safer place.

God of life, we also remember those around the world who not only face the challenges of the pandemic but who are also dealing with food shortages, the impact of climate change on their communities and homes, ongoing war and violence and little hope for the future. Please bring your hope and comfort into these most challenging and dark places.

God of hope we pray for our communities, the places where we live. We pray that our communities would be places where men, women, and children feel valued and respected. We pray for thriving communities and good places for our families to grow up, feel safe and secure. Bring your comfort and hope to shine in the dark places.

God of life, we ask for your healing power on those who are enduring pain and illness.

We especially think of those that we know and we name quietly in our hearts – short silence.

We share the grief of people close to us, who've recently lost loved ones and we also name them before you – short silence.

We know your everlasting light shines with us, in moments of great sadness and great joy.

Within our darkest night, let your light shine.

We remember your church, and we ask that you continue to show us how to serve you, how to use our gifts, how to be salt and light, especially in these challenging and changing times. We pray for your church here in Scotland, that we would be ready to rise up and be the people of God, who are called by you to serve in a variety of situations and places.

Some of us serve in foodbanks, in children's ministries, and in providing pastoral care to those who are housebound. Others teach and lead us in worship, and some of us are called to administration. Whatever you have called us to, we would ask Gracious God, that you continue to equip us through the power of your Holy Spirit, working in us and through us.

God of love and hope,

Renew in us a deeper sense of who we are in you.

Help us to be aware of your presence each and every day.

Make us instruments of love and praise.

May our words, actions and lives be living examples of your forgiving, healing, life-giving love.

We make this prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

Song 3 – Lord of All Hopefulness – Northern Baptist Association Big Sing, Bradford Cathedral

Lord of all hopefulness

Lord of all joy



Whose trust ever child-like
No cares could destroy
Be there at our waking
And give us we pray
Your bliss in our hearts Lord
At the break of the day

Lord of all eagerness
Lord of all faith
Whose strong hands were skilled
At the plane and the lathe
Be there at our labours
And give us we pray
Your strength in our hearts Lord
At the noon of the day

Lord of all kindness
Lord of all grace
Your hands swift to welcome
Your arms to embrace
Be there at our homing
And give us we pray
Your love in our hearts Lord
At the eve of the day

Lord of all gentleness
Lord of all calm
Whose voice is contentment
Whose presence is balm
Be there at our sleeping
And give us we pray
Your peace in our hearts Lord
At the end of the day

Blessing – The Right Reverend Dr Martin Fair, Moderator of the General Assembly

Now shall we go in peace and may the blessing of God Almighty; Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you this day and forever more. Amen

I'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who contributed to today's service and especially those who never get in front of the camera but are doing all the hard work behind it special thanks to them and can I thank you for sharing in our service even remotely it's been good to have you here. Thank You.