

**Easter 5. Leaving day. May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2015.**

Concluding Sermon, Vicar Joyce.

*Acts 8: 26-40, John 15: 1-8*

Opening Prayer: God of tomorrow, we are glad that we cannot contain you within the walls of our yesterdays or of this day. You challenge us to follow Christ into the unknown, where you are present in all your fullness. Amen.

There is a moment in a garage sale, a pause, when I look around; seeing sellers at each table, aprons on, faces ready, change within reach. I know the Op. Shop is staffed, I can smell the sausages and onions cooking, the kitchen is at the ready, the Parish Treasurer stands by. Mary and I linger, watching to see where extra support is needed. We are ready to meet with the community.

It is indeed the church as a grapevine. A group of people of different ages and different nationalities, beautifully interconnected; people with different roles. No one person does everything.

Customers say to me as they manage their loads of bargains. "We love your sales; people are so helpful. There is a good atmosphere here."

A comment from a mother in our Mainly Music group, written in the large card given to us last Thursday. "We have been coming to MM for 6 years; first with Grace and now with my two boys. It is the highlight of the week, teaching us lots of songs, helping with their vocabulary and socialising with others - both me and the kids.

A ministry of a branch of the vine. Church being the highlight of the week.

There is a pause at the beginning of each service where I glance to check that this week's helpers are here. I see people who are the roots of the Parish linking into the tradition of faith, finding resources to strengthen the congregation and giving stability. I see those who communicate well networking along the branches, providing nourishment as they go to and fro. I see people who are like leaves, reaching for light and energy for the parish. They protect the growing fruit from predators and from over-exposure to harsh light. Some branches explore new places for the church to interact with and learn from. Other branches link with those not able to make worship any more or those who choose not to.

I wonder where you would place yourself. "I am the vine," Jesus said to his disciples. Do we value what we have here; a divine link among us?

I like the grapevine picture also because of the connection I feel with people from earlier ministries here and elsewhere in the Diocese, including the Parishes and other ministries where we have served. People reconnect when they need support. Prayer is much more than words and we know that prayer surrounds us all.

But our Gospel speaks of pruning. Who among us prunes the plants in your garden? Does anyone prune grape vines? What does a person who prunes grape vines look for? Why would a person like pruning? What are the benefits? Our life experience helps to prune us. We do not always enjoy it. We speak of growing pains, but then we grow wiser and are grateful.

How will St. Paul's manage in the future and I do not just mean a change of Vicar and husband or wife? There will be challenges both new and old. You are the strength of this Parish community; you have proved your faith and life. I am confident you will continue to grow in grace and mission in the next decade, as you have in the past one.

Those of us privileged to serve in ordained capacity are acutely aware of how much ministry we receive from you, the people. Together we are people of God in this, our Parish and community.

From the Book of Acts reading we have some clues for future mission. We meet an Ethiopian eunuch. He was a rich man, in charge of his country's money, able to take time off to pursue the curiosity of faith. He was driven in a chariot, would have supplies for his long journey and owned a scroll of a Greek translation of the Prophecy of Isaiah.

He was doubly marginalised. Rich and important, but a different race and with a blemished body, so at the temple in Jerusalem he would only have been allowed into the Court of the Gentiles. Philip drew near to him and asked a question. Before long he was travelling with him in conversation, despite their differences of colour and background. When asked about baptism he recognised the man's sincerity and his need to belong to the Christian community. Philip welcomed the eunuch into the faith – he was probably the first African Christian.

Already we have people from many backgrounds here. In the future this will be even more so. Engaging in conversation with people, however different they seem, will be so important. Introduce them to the shop, to the Selwyn Centre, to Mainly Music, to worship. Enjoy the diversity; share your love of the abundant life of faith.

Celebrate the wonder of God's presence. Listen, learn, share. God's empowering presence will be with you all.

We have another song to sing. I was taught this when I first came here. I was impressed by the joy of the young singers. Let's sing about love.