

Fifth Sunday of Easter

† Sunday, 2 May 2021



In England & Wales Cycle of Prayer: New members of the Church

Keynote: The growth of the Church and discipleship

Acts of the Apostles 9: 26-31

Paul, having been an enthusiastic and persistent persecutor of the followers of Jesus, may not have been welcome in Jerusalem, when he returned. It may not be surprising that the Christian community in Jerusalem viewed Paul's arrival among them with some suspicion! *'When Saul got to Jerusalem he tried to join the disciples, but they were afraid of him – they could not believe he really was a disciple. Barnabas, however, took charge of him and introduced him to the apostles.'* By means of Barnabas' warm introduction Paul is able to join the community of believers and he *'now started to go around with them in Jerusalem, preaching fearlessly in the name of the Lord.'* Luke, the writer of Acts, concludes *'The churches... were now left in peace, building themselves up, living in fear of the Lord, and filled with the consolation of the Holy Spirit.'* So the stranger – the unlikely disciple – is warmly welcomed into the Christian community and becomes one of its greatest apostles throughout the known world. Today, all in the Christian community are the witnesses and the welcomers in our own time.

Responsorial Psalm 21 (22) – A song in time of suffering in hope of certain deliverance

First Letter of John 3: 18-24

There is a story told that when the apostle was very old he was invited to preach, and simply stood up and said: 'Love one another', and then sat down! The opening words of this text today do point us in the right direction: *'Our love is not to be just words or mere talk, but something real and active; only by this can we be certain that we are children of the truth.'* For John, the two things that really matter then are *'that we believe in the name of God's Son Jesus Christ, and that we love on another as he told us to.'* If we 'get real' and active about our discipleship in these fundamental ways, John says, then *'whoever keeps these commandments lives in God and God lives in them. We know that God lives in us by the Spirit that is given us.'* Our discipleship brings challenges and a deepening awareness of God's presence in our lives, and this leads into the parable in today's gospel of the vine and the branches.

Gospel according to John 15: 1-8

If you are any kind of gardener, or if you work upon the land you can identify with this parable. Hard pruning often brings strong new growth and a plentiful harvest to follow. The plant that doesn't respond to feeding and pruning can frequently end up on the fire as a waste of space! Jesus tells us, *'I am the true vine and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more.'* This image of the People of God, being the Lord's vineyard is a common theme in both the Old and New Testament. The question is, do we bear the fruit of the Spirit dwelling in us? Does our faith and love shine out, and bring a rich harvest for the Lord of the vineyard? If, not, what should we be doing about it?

Jesus warns us, *'I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty – for cut off from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is like a branch that has been thrown away – it withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire, and they are burnt.'* Discipleship is about living and growing and being fruitful in the vineyard of the Lord.