

Church at home

East Leake Methodist Church 2020

Sit comfortably in a quiet place and prepare, start with a brief period of silence, turning your mind and spirit towards God. You may want to have a cross or candle in view as a focus.

Reflective Worship: Images of God's People

Good Morning. Welcome to worship

Its good isn't it to meet together as part of the Christian church, part of the church family whether in church or using this at home: Even if the circumstances seem a little strange.

And we know that others are worshipping online. All part of the wider Christian church

In the last few months you may have taken the opportunity to look in on worship services from other Christian communities – reminding us that we are part of a worldwide Christian family /the people of God here on earth

// And it's **images of the people of God** that we are thinking of this morning

Call to Worship : 1Peter 2 v 4 and 5a: As you come to him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house

Prayers and Lord's Prayer

Thank you, Lord, that we can meet together, part of this church family, part of your kingdom of love. We thank you for your great Love and generous provision for all people. We thank you that you are here with us today.

We know there are times when we are not the people you want us to be. For these times we are sorry. And we thank you that as we turn again to you we know we have your forgiveness and the fullness of your grace and love.

Help us in this service as we reflect on what it means to be part of God's people: united with one another, united with you. Enable us by your Holy Spirit to hear what you would have us hear as we reflect on the images we find in your Word.

Help us to know the encouragement and strengthening that only you can provide.

Help us to be open to any challenges and opportunities you bring to us -

Lord God we adore you and we worship you . **Amen**>

Lord's Prayer

Our first picture is based on an image we find in John 's gospel / an image from horticulture/ from the garden

Many of us will have spent time in the garden over these past few months - whether its sitting out on a warm day admiring the fruits of our own or someone else's labour or whether it's working in the garden - tending the plants/ taking extra time edging the lawn or gathering those beans or tomatoes

Our first image is that of a vine with its strong, healthy stem, its branches and its luscious fruit.

Reading: John 15 v 1- 5

The Vine, the branches ...and Hampton Court

So, a picture of Jesus as the fruitful vine tended by the Father as the gardener. As well as growth, that picture also included some serious pruning!

In the gospel we hear that it is the pruning that makes the vine fruitful.

Largest vine in the world is in Hampton Court



Planted in 1769 from cutting 100yrs later over a metre around the base, now 4m around base... Its longest branch or rod as it should really be called is 36m long (40 yds). It's obviously looked after well, and I'm told it goes through different forms of pruning at various stages. New shoots have to be reduced, bunches of grapes thinned, leaves sometimes removed to let in light.

So lots of skilful work by the gardener to preserve the vine and produce a delicious crop of black grapes.

// Jesus' disciples had to undergo some serious pruning as they wrestled with Jesus' teaching and sought to understand what he was showing them.

And in our own lives we will have known times of pruning too. /often not an easy process to go through: The last few months have reminded us of that. But the end result can be greater resilience and greater fruitfulness. And often there is deeper understanding of ourselves and of God despite the difficult times we go through / the hard lessons we have had to learn.

We're reflecting on a picture of Jesus as the vine. Christians are seen as the branches radiating out from the main vine but of necessity firmly united with Him: fruitfulness only possible as they remain attached to the vine. And of course the gardener who skilfully and lovingly tends the plant providing all it needs in the different seasons of its life is God the father: A powerful image!

The thought here is that we need to remain in touch with God – apart from God we achieve far less. We need his Spirit working through us enriching our lives and making our efforts more fruitful / indeed producing within us those fruits of the Spirit.

Reading on, we are reminded we experience joy as well as mutual love and support :that unique and powerful fellowship we experience as part of the Christian Family. Take a moment to reflect on this image of the fruitful vine or look at **verse 2 and 3 of Hymn 252 StF : Jesus the Lord said..**

Our 2nd image is that of the people of God as a body. Paul uses this image in his letters to the Ephesians and to the Corinthians.

Reading: 1 Corinthians 12 v 12-20

The Head, the body ... and a box of crayons.

A picture of God's people as a body. We all know what it's like when even the smallest part of our body is hurting – the toothache that keeps us awake, the finger that has a thorn after we 've been pruning or tidying up the garden. That part of the body however small demands our attention.



The passage stressed all parts of the body are needed; none are indispensable: each has their roles to play. There was that slightly comedic conversation / the foot talking of the hand/ the ear of the eye.

Just in case we missed the point, Paul spells it out later in verse 27 “You are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it” Various roles are then listed in the rest of the chapter.

Paul uses a similar image in Ephesians. In Ch. 1 he talks of Christ as the head and the church as his body. As we reflect on these images we’re surely thinking of interdependence, of needing one another, of mutual support in difficult times, of unity with one another and with Christ; and yet diversity too within that unity. Expecting some profound theological insights!!(possibly not), I looked to see what the internet had to say about the Cor passage. What I found was profound, but it was presented in the form of another image: A brand new box of crayons.

The internet page had a picture of 24 wax Crayola crayons. [Susan Rieske](#), the writer, spoke of that sense of satisfaction on taking out a brand new box of crayons – how it made her want to sit with her children and do some coloring. Each crayon slightly different from the others. If one colour was missing the end product would be so much poorer.

Each part of the body is needed. Each shade of colour adds to the richness of the picture. Each of us is needed to live out the work of the church. Each of us is needed to play our part in God’s kingdom. If one crayon is missing the box is incomplete. God’s world is a world of lavish colour. If you watch Countryfile on a Sunday evening, you’ll have seen bright and beautiful pics sent in by viewers for the 2021 calendar: intricate detail and vivid colour.

Imagine our world without the yellow of the sun or the blues of the water. Imagine our church without the colour that each individual brings to it. ? maybe that's all too easy to picture given the way 2020 has been. Every member of the body is precious and needed. *In God's hands the unique colour of an individual is used to contribute to his masterpiece. As we use our God given gifts and abilities God shines through into the lives of others. Many crayons, one box. Many members, one body*

Take a moment for reflection and/or reflect on
hymn **92 StF Think of a World (ie. verses 1,3 and 8)**

Youtube has 2 very different viewings at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=67ICY8V3inc>
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TsoC1lhBAde>

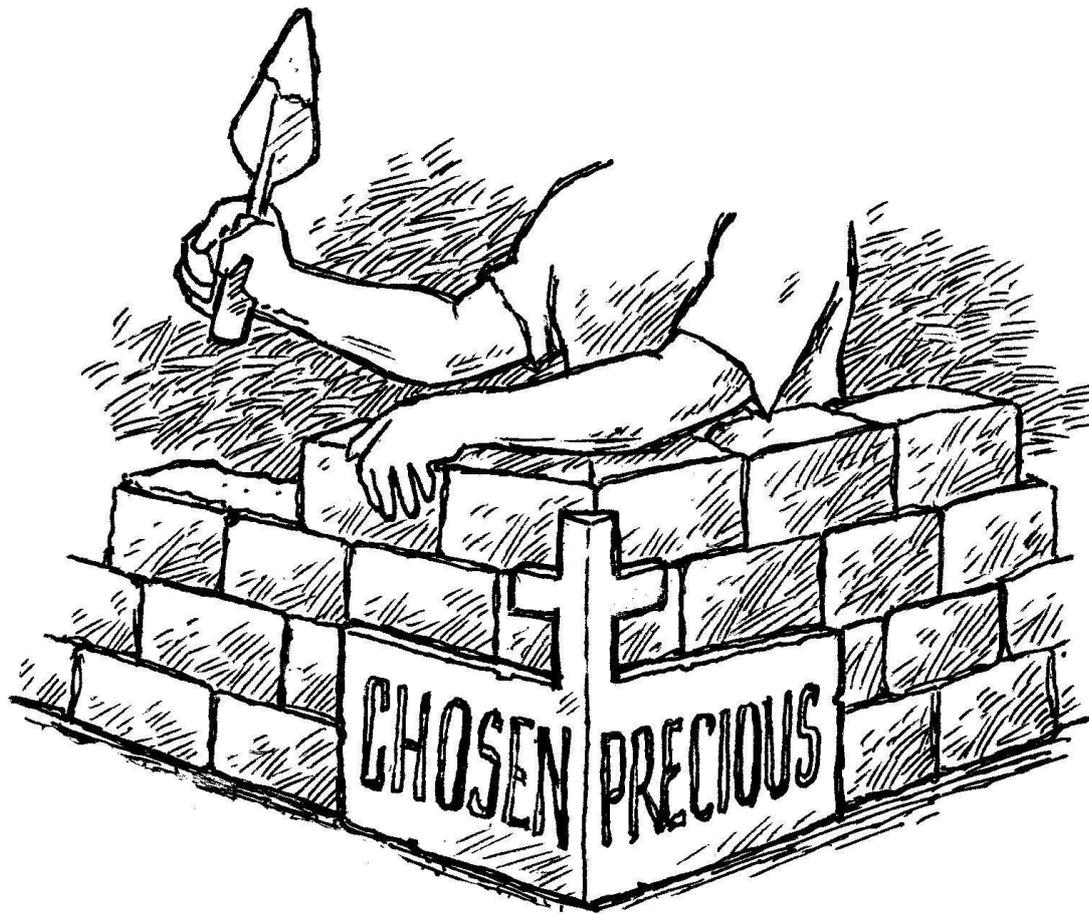
Our third picture is of a building under construction.

Reading: Ephesians 2 v 19- 22

The Chief Cornerstone, foundations
....and living stones.

. What struck me as I reflected on this passage is the dynamic growth: We're told the whole building is rising to become a holy temple to the Lord. It's not static/ it continues to be a work in progress. The thought reminded me of the cathedral La Sagrada Familia in Barcelona where construction began in 1882 and is still underway. It is expected to be completed in 2041.

// or we could think of our own premises here: many years of witness and worship. The building itself sees development. And the development continues - as we look to future work, as we adjust to the new normal. How we glorify God, how we witness to his Love in future months and yrs.
And of course, the church family itself isn't static, people join us and its great to have them with us and people move on. We experience all that Christian Fellowship means.



The picture included the chief cornerstone and the foundations. The chief cornerstone is Christ himself.

The cornerstones of the temple at Jerusalem which Jesus and his disciples would have seen were impressive: a stone at the SW corner was 37' long (10m) / According to Josephus the historian, stones in the temple were also up to 12' high (3m) and 18' wide (5m). The stones were purest white; some overlaid with gold. *Interestingly given our previous image, Herod had donated a golden vine with grape clusters as tall as a man. So the whole building was magnificent.*

While **the cornerstone** is Christ, the impressive building that is rising also has its solid base in the faithful often costly work done by prophets, apostles, - and I'm sure we could add the wonderful work of saints throughout the generations. We have a great heritage as a Christian church whether we think of John Wesley or Martin Luther or of little known missionaries who gave their lives (often after only a short period of service) in countries across the globe.// And it's a salutary thought that as we make our contribution to the building that is rising, our part in God's kingdom, we're creating something that future generations will have to build on.

So, a dynamic structure – linking back to Christ’s life, death and resurrection / pointing forwards through history and time.

And we notice too, the structure has within it God himself in the power of the Holy Spirit. Quite a picture!

I began our service with verses from Peter’s letter – he spoke of Christ as the living stone and also described believers as being like living stones. *I read recently of a traveler who was part of a group being shown round Galilee. He said in his blog: Our guide led us through the narrow streets of Jesus’ home base in Galilee, pointing out to us how the dwellings of the town were built of small, blackish stones. It appeared that no mortar kept these stones together.*

He told us that these were called “living stones.” They were rubbed together until they fit together perfectly.

The traveller then added this comment A very apt image of the church today: - a community of living stones. It is only when we rub up against one another or are forced to do so, that we learn what real love and real community are all about. Only then are we able to grow and change and to fit together in a way that is strong and durable. An interesting thought!

Take a moment to reflect on these images: The vine, the body, the crayons or the dynamic building

You may like to read or listen to **The Church’s one Foundation** StF 690 eg. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQv4EAwMFoQ>

Prayers of Intercession:

Give thanks and pray for all those enabling worship to take place today whether online or in church buildings.

Give thanks for the people of God; connected to the Vine, empowered by the Holy Spirit: the dynamic Christian church

Pray for people in their differing roles, enriching the life of our church family/ bringing variety and diversity like the crayons in the box.

Pray for any who are ill; those shielding and feeling isolated ; those affected by the economic problems ; Young people as the academic year begins, their teachers and Further education staff

Hold before God, people you know in need of prayer

Reflect on the many and profound needs of our world: Think of all that is in the news at the moment: America, Belarus, Yemen, Migrants, Our own government, Climate crisis

- Focus on one such area in prayer.

Lord we bring our prayers to you, knowing that you delight to hear them and will answer them in your best way. Help us to be ready to be part of those answers.

Blessing

You may also like to use the following Meditation: adapted from a longer poem by [Michael Johnson](#):

The word of God has clearly shown
Yet few have understood
That God will build a house of stone
A house from flesh and blood

God's stones my friends are you and I
Redeemed and free of shame
Assembled to the Lord on high
To magnify His name

No lime, cement, no gravel or sand
No tool of iron or steel
Yet God will raise upon his Rock
a house of living stones

From every land The Builder calls
He knows each stone by name
It's then stones find, through Jesus Christ
Within God's house their place.