

## *Sunday Thought*

**2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021 Fifth Sunday of Easter**

Readings

Acts 8: 26 - 40

Psalm 22: 25 - 31

1 John 4: 7 – 21

John 15: 1 - 8

### **Pruning Time**



The re-opening of hairdressing shops and salons has made what used to be a 'tidy-up' seem more like a major pruning. Many years ago, my haircuts were closely associated with vines and grapes. At regular intervals I would travel from our village of Bakau in Gambia to the home of a Lebanese gentleman in Banjul (Bathurst then) who used hairdressing for a supplementary income. His 'salon' was the vine-covered terrace of his roadside home. While he 'pruned' me we talked and I took notice of bunches of grapes above me and in season, the evidence of my friend's meticulous care of his vines – discarded branches and well-trimmed new growth. Needless to say, Jesus words from today's Gospel reading were never far from my mind.

It is comforting to know we may be close to the end of the much-discussed roadmap out of Covid19 restrictions. Many of us know that even then life is not likely to be just the same as it was a year ago. We could be in for a great deal of life-pruning. I hear from many quarters that Commerce and Industry will resume with large numbers of employees working from home. Those who do return to 'the office' or shopfloor will find different layouts of equipment to allow for safeguarding measures. Shopping and the shopping centres will become different, even strange, experiences. One organisation tells us that the pandemic has caused them to make changes now which were intended for implementation over the next two or three years. Sadly, work forces have been pruned along with what we think of as vital public services meaning higher unemployment figures and changed life-styles... and much more. We pray that the overall pruning in our society may bring more and better 'fruits' of every kind.

Jesus' words about pruning the vines in today's Gospel reading had a personal meaning. He assured his followers that their belief in him and his words brings them the gift of eternal life. Their faith was marked by the act of baptism as in the story of Evangelist Philip and the man from Ethiopia in today's Acts reading.

Eternal life is the life of God in us – Christ in us! It is the fullest and best life both now and in heaven. As with all life, the Christ-life has to be nurtured and developed to achieve its full potential. *It's like the grapevine*, he told them. *Think of me as the vine and yourselves as branches. You can only be fruitful in life if you continue to grow in me, so that God's love, like the sap of the vine, can flow between us. Then your lives will show love in your character and in your compassion for others, for society, for a whole world of many needs.*

The passage from John's letter develops Jesus' theme. *It's all about love*, he says. *God loves us because he IS LOVE! He gave us Jesus to show us that love and we respond to it by loving him and living a whole life of love for others.* The passage reminds me of Christina Rossetti's words [435 in the 1933 Methodist Hymnbook]

*Love is the key to life and death,  
Of hidden, heavenly mystery:  
Of all Christ is, of all he said,  
Love is the key.*

Back to the grapevine and its pruning. If God's love in us is to bear fruit in love for others, we have to be willing to submit to his pruning. Old branches like stale habits, materialism, broken relations need to be chopped off or sorted in a general tidying up of life.

After the pandemic the same will surely have to be said to the church as a whole family. We shall see activities of fellowship, worship and mission that have to change. The lopping and clipping may be painful, but again what may have taken years could produce new and better fruits in very short time. Returning to Christina ...

*As three times to his saint, he said, He says to me; He says to you, 'Do you love Me?*

### *A prayer*

*Bearing in mind the people of India as Covid19 sweeps their land again*

*[Selected words from Psalm 22 – a psalm we believe Jesus prayed on the Cross]*

*My God, why have you abandoned me? ...  
Since the day I was born you have been my God..  
I feel helpless about my troubles...but...  
You do not neglect the poor and suffering ....  
You are Lord! You will save your people!*

