

# Penge Congregational Church



**November 2020**



An initiative of Hope Together

We are asked to pray where we are, that God will give us opportunities to witness to Christ, at 8.20pm (20.20 hours) on the 20<sup>th</sup> of each month, for 20 minutes.

The Prayer for Friday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2020:  
Read John 10:14: "Ask anything in my name, and I will do it!"

And pray:

God of compassion, thank you for coming to seek and save the lost. Help us in all we do to look out for those in our communities who are living on the margins. May we always seek to bring love and justice.



*Pray ... that God  
will give many  
opportunities to  
speak about Christ.*

**Colossians 4:3**



## **From the Minister**

Have you read Psalm 136 lately? It's the one with this response after each verse: *His faithful love endures forever*. The first nine verses are lovely, praising God for his miraculous creation. Then we get to verse 10: "Give thanks for him who killed the firstborn of Egypt"; verse 15, "He hurled Pharaoh and his army into the sea"; verse 17, "He killed mighty kings". Doesn't that sound awfully like exulting over the grief of someone's parent or sibling?

There are other places in the Old Testament where we read of large scale slaughter of people who, by their own lights, were defending their families and land against the encroaching Israelites, and in reading them, we must feel uncomfortable. That's where we need to have read the whole Bible: we need to have read about God's promise of a new covenant in people's hearts; we need to have read about the coming of Jesus, his death on the cross to buy back our sins; his resurrection by which all who follow him are gifted a new life. In that, we have an invitation to the whole world to partake of the love of God, to revel in the joy of being his child. In that, we can share the wonder of having a God who loves everyone- at his own expense.

In this month where we remember those who died and suffered in war, this is a perspective we need to have in our hearts and minds. My mother once told me that, towards the end of the Second World War, when she was a teenager, she and her friends would go to the cinema and watch the Pathé newsreels. They would see footage of German planes being shot down, of allied armies driving back German soldiers, of allied planes setting off to bomb Dresden and other cities into oblivion. And the cinema audience would cheer. They would think only of what the people of this country had suffered in the Blitz, of the British soldiers and sailors killed, injured and taken prisoner.

And they would cheer to see the German soldiers and civilians being paid back.

That is a very understandable human emotion. Perhaps we who are suffering under the Covid pandemic can have some small inkling of what the people of this country went through during five and a half years of total war. Yet, now that 75-80 years have gone by, perhaps we can also be aware that the largely innocent people of Germany and her allies went through the same experience. Perhaps we can think of the bereaved parents, wives, sisters and brothers; of the ordinary people who suffered the same experiences of being bombed, starved and so on; of the fact that, as the defeated side, those people who had lost their homes and possessions suffered for a very long time after the war was over.

And I think even most of the dwindling generation who lived through the war do empathise. Certainly the years since the war ended have been years of reconciliation. Germany is our ally. If you go to Berlin, you can see the incredibly moving Holocaust memorial near to the Brandenburg Gate. You can also see, even after all this time, that public buildings are now still being rebuilt after they were destroyed by allied bombing- the process of course having been delayed by 40 years of Cold War.

This process of reconciliation, of forgiving your enemy, is a fundamental part of the teachings of Jesus Christ. Remember, he taught us to pray, "Forgive us our sins *as we forgive those who sin against us.*" We can equate those sessions in the cinema during the war, cheering the death of enemy servicemen, with the attitude of the writer of Psalm 136. But, when the lights come up in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the whole world can be invited to forgive the wrongs of others, to revel in the love of a God who loves us all, to be reconciled to our fellow human beings in the joy of following a Saviour who came to reconcile us to God.

At this time of Remembrance, let us not think about victory and defeat, let us not think about glorious sacrifice for country, let us instead think of forgiveness, of kindness and of reconciliation. This is surely what Jesus wants from us!

**Pam**

**When you forgive, you heal, and , when you let go, you grow.**

**We are still meeting virtually on Zoom twice a week for an informal Bible discussion, on Thursdays and Sundays at 6.30pm. By this means, we have reconnected with church members who have moved away from the area. It would be lovely if others who have internet access would join us for these sessions, which are also a time of catching up with one another. If you haven't used Zoom before, simply Google Zoom, and opt to Join a Meeting. Zoom ID 597 482 5851. Password 304 428.**

**Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November should have been Church Day, and Autumn Gift Day. This year, as with so much else, we aren't going to be able to have our usual Church Day get together. It also seems inappropriate to ask people to give an extra gift to the church when so many are struggling financially. Yet, although a couple of groups are back in the Halls and therefore paying us rent, we have lost much of our income. And, during the Autumn storms we have already had, the church roof has chosen this moment to remind us of existing leaks and develop a few new ones. So, if anyone does feel able to give a Gift day donation, please contact Lynn. (see back page).**

## Harvest 2020

As with so much else, we weren't able to have a Harvest Festival this year. But we did have a Harvest service, thinking about Jesus the True Vine. And we were able to give to Living Well: a Nissan Micra bootful of food and toiletries for the food bank; and a £70 donation for their Covid fund which helps people who are struggling to pay their bills. Grateful thanks to all who contributed to this effort.

For those who were not able to be in church on Harvest morning, here is Pam's sermon on John 15: 1-8:

Today should have been Harvest Festival, when we have our young people here from the uniformed groups. There should have been activity tables, dancers; we should have been able to belt out "We plough the fields and scatter". Sadly, none of that is possible, and perhaps we shouldn't mourn it too much when others in our country are suffering under worse restrictions- at least unlike first year students in some universities we aren't locked in a flat 24-7 with people we haven't got to know yet!

The things to hold on to are that, first and foremost, we are here and able to worship God together. And second, we can still give Harvest gifts to help the vulnerable in our community. All of our gifts, both of food and of money, will go to Living Well, to the food bank there and to their initiatives to help struggling people with their bills, with counselling and with support in finding work.

And that's important. As our call to worship [2 Corinthians 9] tells us, "the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each decide in your heart how much to give. And don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. "For God loves a person who gives cheerfully."

Jesus rephrases the commandments in this way: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind

and all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself". So when we give, our tins of food go to those in need, but our generous impulse to give goes to God, who loves a cheerful giver.

Obviously at harvest time, we use imagery of sowing seed and harvesting crops. The parable of the sower is a favourite. The image of the people of God as plants is a favourite too. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul is praying for spiritual growth for the believers: "Christ will make his home in your hearts as you trust in him. Your roots will grow down into God's love and make you strong."

Anyone here who has green fingers, will know that this is the time of the year when a gardener takes cuttings. Unlike me, my mother could root anything- you just take a side shoot off a plant like a geranium or an African violet, dip it in rooting powder, or indeed honey, push it into a pot of earth, and, Bob's your uncle, next spring you will have lots of new plants. That's a good image of what we are called to do as disciples. We are God's plants, and we can use our faith to root lots of other healthy flourishing plants for God's harvest fields. The rooting powder or honey is our witness.

But Jesus, teaching his disciples for the last time before the crucifixion, uses another image. Not of lots of little plants flourishing alongside one another, but of one plant, a vine, representing the whole kingdom of God.

In the OT, the grapevine and the vineyard are images often used to represent God's people, planted by him in the Promised Land and tended by him. We see it used in the Psalms, in Isaiah, in Jeremiah, in Ezekiel, in Hosea. But here Jesus makes an important departure from this image. God is still the gardener but *Jesus* is the true grapevine- he says a relationship with God requires an attachment to him. It's another way of saying "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me". As Jesus prepares his disciples for his departure from them, he is illustrating the importance of remaining in close fellowship with him. To sustain spiritual health in the world, believers must maintain a close connection with Christ.



Now you will note the word that Jesus uses repeatedly- it sometimes translates as "abide", sometimes as "remain". It's a Greek word, *meno*, that Jesus used a lot. John 8 quotes him as saying, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings". The idea behind it is that a disciple's life is formed entirely by Jesus' word. Again and again in this passage of teaching at the Last Supper, Jesus talks about this. He says that the Son is in the Father and the Father is in the Son. When we remain in Christ, the Son is in us and we are in the Father and the Son. Both God and Jesus come and make their home in every disciple. We often use the word, *indwelling*, to describe the presence of the Holy Spirit in each one of us. What Jesus says about us remaining in him, him remaining in his father and God remaining in his son, describes a sort of mutual indwelling. We can't gain a permanent relationship with God by our own efforts. It can only be permanent because God in his grace and his love comes to dwell within us and strengthens our own efforts to be faithful. So remaining or abiding means a commitment from us as disciples but also from God. This mutual indwelling, is an enduring, permanent, eternal relationship.

All this is what Jesus is saying when he describes himself as the vine and his followers as the branches. If we don't flourish and grow in that relationship, we aren't fully committed to it and we must be pruned away so that the healthy branches can produce more fruit. A living vine branch produces clusters of grapes. Connection with the vine allows the life of Jesus to flow fruitfully through the disciple. If we claim to be attached to Jesus but produce no fruit, we actually aren't remaining in him and we are useless.

But if we are actually in that wonderful mutual relationship, then Jesus says we may ask for whatever we wish and it will be granted. "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish and it will be done for you".

This, in case you were wondering, is where our theme of unity comes in. The vine is one plant. If we remain in Jesus, if our lives are in harmony with him, then truly we can ask him for anything because our prayers are controlled by his word. A chapter further back in John, Jesus explains that we can ask

anything in his name and he will do it, because in granting our prayers, he brings glory to God.

If we live as true disciples of Jesus, we will live a transformed, fruitful life because of the loving, harmonious relationship we have with both Jesus and with his Father.

Now all this might seem very hifaluting, perhaps way above our pay grade. Just the sort of thing that makes so many Christians declare that they aren't good enough. But remember Jesus came for everyone. The gifts of the Spirit are for everyone who believes. The fruit Jesus talks about doesn't have to be something amazing like Billy Graham bringing hundreds to God in one rally. The fruit you bear may very well be much smaller. Perhaps it's a kind word to someone in distress. Perhaps it's a cup of tea offered to a visitor, hospitality that makes someone feel valued. Perhaps it's a tin of tomatoes donated to the food bank. Remember that each of these things is valuable to God, not just for itself but for what is in your heart when you do it.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you".

"Love the lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind and all your strength, and love your neighbour as yourself".

That kind word, that cup of tea, that tin of tomatoes goes to another human being. The love in your heart that prompted it goes straight to God!

## **Readings for November**

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November.

Unity: Zephaniah 3: 14-20 (NLT)

<sup>14</sup> Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel!

Be glad and rejoice with all your heart,

O daughter of Jerusalem!

<sup>15</sup> For the Lord will remove his hand of judgment  
and will disperse the armies of your enemy.

And the Lord himself, the King of Israel,  
will live among you!

At last your troubles will be over,  
and you will never again fear disaster.

<sup>16</sup> On that day the announcement to Jerusalem will be,  
"Cheer up, Zion! Don't be afraid!

<sup>17</sup> For the Lord your God is living among you.  
He is a mighty saviour.

He will take delight in you with gladness.

With his love, he will calm all your fears.

He will rejoice over you with joyful songs."

<sup>18</sup> "I will gather you who mourn for the appointed festivals; you  
will be disgraced no more.

<sup>19</sup> And I will deal severely with all who have oppressed you. I  
will save the weak and helpless ones;

I will bring together those who were chased away.

I will give glory and fame to my former exiles,

wherever they have been mocked and shamed.

<sup>20</sup> On that day I will gather you together  
and bring you home again.

I will give you a good name, a name of distinction,  
among all the nations of the earth,

as I restore your fortunes before their very eyes.

I, the Lord, have spoken!"

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> November. Remembrance Sunday. Reconciliation-  
Jacob and Esau make peace, from Genesis 32-33.

<sup>3</sup> Then Jacob sent messengers ahead to his brother, Esau, who  
was living in the region of Seir in the land of Edom. <sup>4</sup> He told  
them, "Give this message to my master Esau: 'Humble  
greetings from your servant Jacob. Until now I have been living  
with Uncle Laban, <sup>5</sup> and now I own cattle, donkeys, flocks of  
sheep and goats, and many servants, both men and women. I  
have sent these messengers to inform my lord of my coming,  
hoping that you will be friendly to me.'" <sup>6</sup> After delivering the

message, the messengers returned to Jacob and reported, "We met your brother, Esau, and he is already on his way to meet you—with an army of 400 men!"<sup>7</sup> Jacob was terrified at the news. He divided his household, along with the flocks and herds and camels, into two groups.<sup>8</sup> He thought, "If Esau meets one group and attacks it, perhaps the other group can escape."<sup>9</sup> Then Jacob prayed, "O God of my grandfather Abraham, and God of my father, Isaac—O Lord, you told me, 'Return to your own land and to your relatives.' And you promised me, 'I will treat you kindly.'<sup>10</sup> I am not worthy of all the unfailing love and faithfulness you have shown to me, your servant. When I left home and crossed the Jordan River, I owned nothing except a walking stick. Now my household fills two large camps!<sup>11</sup> O Lord, please rescue me from the hand of my brother, Esau. I am afraid that he is coming to attack me, along with my wives and children.

**33** Then Jacob looked up and saw Esau coming with his 400 men. So he divided the children among Leah, Rachel, and his two servant wives.<sup>2</sup> He put the servant wives and their children at the front, Leah and her children next, and Rachel and Joseph last.<sup>3</sup> Then Jacob went on ahead. As he approached his brother, he bowed to the ground seven times before him.<sup>4</sup> Then Esau ran to meet him and embraced him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. And they both wept.<sup>5</sup> Then Esau looked at the women and children and asked, "Who are these people with you?" "These are the children God has graciously given to me, your servant," Jacob replied.<sup>6</sup> Then the servant wives came forward with their children and bowed before him.<sup>7</sup> Next came Leah with her children, and they bowed before him. Finally, Joseph and Rachel came forward and bowed before him.<sup>8</sup> "And what were all the flocks and herds I met as I came?" Esau asked. Jacob replied, "They are a gift, my lord, to ensure your friendship."<sup>9</sup> "My brother, I have plenty," Esau answered. "Keep what you have for yourself."<sup>10</sup> But Jacob insisted, "No, if

I have found favor with you, please accept this gift from me. And what a relief to see your friendly smile. It is like seeing the face of God! <sup>11</sup> Please take this gift I have brought you, for God has been very gracious to me. I have more than enough." And because Jacob insisted, Esau finally accepted the gift.

Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> November.

Reconciliation- Joseph and his brothers. Genesis 50.

<sup>12</sup> So Jacob's sons did as he had commanded them. <sup>13</sup> They carried his body to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre. This is the cave that Abraham had bought as a permanent burial site from Ephron the Hittite. <sup>14</sup> After burying Jacob, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had accompanied him to his father's burial.

<sup>15</sup> But now that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers became fearful. "Now Joseph will show his anger and pay us back for all the wrong we did to him," they said. <sup>16</sup> So they sent this message to Joseph: "Before your father died, he instructed us <sup>17</sup> to say to you: 'Please forgive your brothers for the great wrong they did to you—for their sin in treating you so cruelly.' So we, the servants of the God of your father, beg you to forgive our sin." When Joseph received the message, he broke down and wept. <sup>18</sup> Then his brothers came and threw themselves down before Joseph. "Look, we are your slaves!" they said. <sup>19</sup> But Joseph replied, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? <sup>20</sup> You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. <sup>21</sup> No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children." So he reassured them by speaking kindly to them.

Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> November.

Reconciliation- the Prodigal son- Luke 15: 11-32.

<sup>11</sup> To illustrate the point further, Jesus told them this story: "A man had two sons. <sup>12</sup> The younger son told his father, 'I want

my share of your estate now before you die.' So his father agreed to divide his wealth between his sons. <sup>13</sup> "A few days later this younger son packed all his belongings and moved to a distant land, and there he wasted all his money in wild living.

<sup>14</sup> About the time his money ran out, a great famine swept over the land, and he began to starve. <sup>15</sup> He persuaded a local farmer to hire him, and the man sent him into his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup> The young man became so hungry that even the pods he was feeding the pigs looked good to him. But no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup> "When he finally came to his senses, he said to himself, 'At home even the hired servants have food enough to spare, and here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup> I will go home to my father and say, "Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, <sup>19</sup> and I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Please take me on as a hired servant.'"

<sup>20</sup> "So he returned home to his father. And while he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming. Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him. <sup>21</sup> His son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against both heaven and you, and I am no longer worthy of being called your son.' <sup>22</sup> "But his father said to the servants, 'Quick! Bring the finest robe in the house and put it on him. Get a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet. <sup>23</sup> And kill the calf we have been fattening. We must celebrate with a feast, <sup>24</sup> for this son of mine was dead and has now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found.' So the party began.

<sup>25</sup> "Meanwhile, the older son was in the fields working. When he returned home, he heard music and dancing in the house, <sup>26</sup> and he asked one of the servants what was going on. <sup>27</sup> 'Your brother is back,' he was told, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf. We are celebrating because of his safe return.' <sup>28</sup> "The older brother was angry and wouldn't go in. His father came out and begged him, <sup>29</sup> but he replied, 'All these years I've slaved for you and never once refused to do a single thing you told me to. And in all that time you never gave me even one young goat for a feast with my friends. <sup>30</sup> Yet when this son of yours comes back after squandering your money on prostitutes, you celebrate by killing the fattened calf!' <sup>31</sup> "His father said to him, 'Look, dear son, you have always stayed by me, and everything I have is yours. <sup>32</sup> We had to celebrate this

happy day. For your brother was dead and has come back to life! He was lost, but now he is found!”

Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> November. Advent Sunday.

The Hope of a Messiah. John 1: 1-18.

**1** In the beginning the Word already existed.

The Word was with God, and the Word was God.

**2** He existed in the beginning with God.

**3** God created everything through him,  
and nothing was created except through him.

**4** The Word gave life to everything that was created,  
and his life brought light to everyone.

**5** The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness can never extinguish it.

**6** God sent a man, John the Baptist, **7** to tell about the light so that everyone might believe because of his testimony. **8** John himself was not the light; he was simply a witness to tell about the light. **9** The one who is the true light, who gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. **10** He came into the very world he created, but the world didn't recognize him. **11** He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. **12** But to all who believed him and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. **13** They are reborn—not with a physical birth resulting from human passion or plan, but a birth that comes from God. **14** So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son.

**15** John testified about him when he shouted to the crowds, "This is the one I was talking about when I said, 'Someone is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.'" **16** From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another. **17** For the law was given through Moses, but God's unfailing love and faithfulness came through Jesus Christ. **18** No one has ever seen God. But the unique One, who is himself God, is near to the Father's heart. He has revealed God to us.

## **Penge Congregational Church**

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