

Churches Together in St Annes on the Sea

A Meditation for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity 2021

Abiding in Christ

Introduction

This year the theme of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, chosen by the sisters of the Community of Grandchamp in Switzerland, is: “Abide in my love and you shall bear much fruit”.

It is the great desire of God, expressed by Jesus, that we might come to him and abide in him. He waits for us tirelessly, hoping that, united to him in love, we will bear fruit that will bring life to all. Faced with our differences, we risk withdrawing into ourselves and seeing only that which separates us. But let us listen to how Christ calls us to abide in his love, and so bear much fruit.

In the three moments of prayer that follow, we remember the call of Christ, we turn to his love, to him who is the centre of our life. For the path of unity begins in our intimate relationship with God. Abiding in God’s love strengthens the desire to seek unity and reconciliation with others. God opens us up to those who are different from us. This is an important fruit, a gift of healing for the divisions within us, between us, and in the world.

An Opening Prayer

Lord, you are the vinedresser who cares for us with love. You call on us to see the beauty of each branch united to the vine, the beauty of each person. And yet, too often the differences in others make us afraid. We withdraw into ourselves. Our trust in you is forsaken. Enmity develops between us. Come and direct our hearts toward you once again. Grant us to live from your forgiveness so that we may be together and praise your name.

1. Our Unity with Christ Psalm: 103:1-6 Reading: Jn 15:1-17

Intercessions

God of love, through Christ you said to us: “You did not choose me but I chose you.” You seek us, you invite us to receive your friendship and abide in it. Teach us to respond more deeply to this invitation, and grow in a life that is ever more complete.

God you who gather, you knit us together as one vine in your Son Jesus. May your loving Spirit abide in us at local church and community meetings and ecumenical gatherings. Grant that together we celebrate you with joy.

God of the one vineyard, you call us to abide in your love in all we do and say. Touched by your goodness, grant us to be a reflection of that love in our homes and workplaces. May we bridge rivalries and overcome tensions.

Action: A time of silence.

Very often we think of prayer as something we do, an activity of our own. In this short time we are invited to an interior silence, and to turn aside from all the noise and concerns of our lives and thoughts. In this silence the action belongs to God. We are simply called to abide and rest in God’s love. Silence (approximately 5 minutes)

2. Our Unity with All Christians Psalm: 133 Reading: 1 Cor 1:10-13a

Intercessions

Holy Spirit, you create and re-create the Church in all places. Come and whisper in our

hearts the prayer which Jesus addressed to his Father on the eve of his passion: “that they may all be one... so that the world may believe”.

Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, light the fire of your love in us so that suspicions, contempt and misunderstanding cease in the Church. May the walls that separate us fall.

Holy Spirit, Consoler of all, open our hearts to forgiveness and reconciliation and bring us back from our wanderings.

Holy Spirit, you never abandon the men, women and children who are persecuted for their fidelity to the gospel. Give them strength and courage, and support those who help them.

Action: Pray for Other Churches

The Lord calls us to be united among ourselves. Pray for the work and witness of the other churches in St Annes - (Church Road Methodist, Fylde Christian Service, Our Lady Star of the Sea RC, St Alban's RC, St Annes' Baptist, St Anne's C of E, St Annes' United Reformed, St Gregory's Othodox Chapel, St Margaret's C of E, St Thomas' C of E, The Drive Methodist). Pray for those churches around the world suffering persecution.

3. Our Unity with all peoples and all creation Psalm: 96:10-13 Reading: Rev. 79-12

Intercessions

God of life, you have created every human being in your image and likeness. We sing your praise for the gift of our many cultures, expressions of faith, traditions and ethnicities. Grant us the courage always to stand against injustice and hatred based on race, class, gender, religion, and fear of those not like ourselves.

Merciful God, you have shown us in Christ that we are one in you. Teach us to use this gift in the world so that believers of all faiths in every country may be able to listen to each other and live in peace.

O Jesus, you came into the world and shared fully in our humanity. You know the hardships of life for people who suffer in so many different ways. May the Spirit of compassion move us to share our time, life and goods with all those in need.

Holy Spirit, you hear the fury of your wounded creation and the cries of those already suffering from climate change and from the Coronavirus. Guide us toward new behaviours. May we learn to live in harmony as part of your creation.

Action: Moving to the centre... and out to the world

Jesus calls us to abide in him, as branches of the true vine. He calls us to bear the fruit of God's healing and reconciling love. He calls us to draw closer to God and to one another as we offer this love to the world.

Imagine a circle drawn on the ground. Imagine that this circle is the world. At the centre of the world is God, in whom all our desires and longings find their meeting place. As we move closer to God, so we draw closer to one another. And the closer we come to one another.....the closer we come to God

Spirituality and solidarity are inseparably linked. Prayer and action belong together. When we abide in Christ, we receive the Spirit of courage and wisdom to act against all injustice and oppression even in these difficult times of the pandemic. Be one, so that the world may believe! Abide in God's love and bear the fruits of this love.

A Closing Prayer

May the God of hope fill us with all joy and all peace in faith, so that we may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen