



# TOGETHER

[NewarkandSouthwellMethodist.org.uk](http://NewarkandSouthwellMethodist.org.uk)

*This week's front page is inspired by Nathan's sermon from last week's lectionary reading. When he and I chatted about what we felt God was saying to us, in our weekly staff meeting, the theme of being, not doing, definitely came up, alongside the theme of remaining in Jesus - maybe it's a thread we need to hear! (Written by Rev Peter Hibberts)*

## Getting 'Dusty'!

Reflecting on being and doing - what is the 'better part' and how do we sit at the feet of Jesus? (Luke 11:38-42)

**A**re you a Mary or a Martha? For those who don't know the passage Mary is the one who sits at Jesus' feet (symbolic of being a disciple - more about this below) whilst Mary is 'distracted by all the preparations that had to be made'.

I'm definitely a Martha. In fact, I'm an awful Martha. When I prepare dinner and all the family are at the table eating I will often just try to get ahead of the clearing up a little, put a few things in the dishwasher, rinse that pan or put that tray to soak. Sensible, you may think. Then, I finally sit down to find that the kids have almost finished eating! Katie, on the other hand, is a wonderful Mary. She stops, focusses beyond the distractions and has already had a conversation with the children about their day and listened to their joys and troubles; which is definitely the 'better part' (as Jesus calls it in this passage).

It's not just about chores either. When I get to the study, in the basement of SMC, after the school run on a normal day (this morning is a typical example) my head is always buzzing with the things I need to do: the email or WhatsApp message I need to send, the piece of paperwork I need to take care of, the business that needs to be attended to. What do you get bogged down with?

That's the problem, the busy-ness. Ironically, when we are busier, we need more 'Mary' time (to stay grounded, rooted, remaining in Jesus) and yet it's precisely at those times that many of us spend less Mary time; we, instead, choose to work harder and *do* more - and we actually end up *being* less. Here's the challenge then, how do those of us who are Marthas take a leaf out of Mary's book?

During my recent quarter days (three days ministers take every three months for personal restorative work - 'Mary' time for clergy, if you like) I decided it was time to be more intentional with how I spend my time. I considered all of the things that I am called to do as a minister and all of the time (each week) I spend in ministry (normally twelve sessions per week, with a session being a morning afternoon or evening). I made a template with the fixtures I cannot move (services, regular fellowship meetings etc.) and then I set about working a balance of meeting/leading/preaching; desk and preparation time; pastoral and relationship time; and restorative/Mary time. It's still just a plan but I hope to reduce my desk time and raise my relationship and restorative time. It's not going to be easy and will require strong priorities - doing *fewer* things *better*. As I sit at Jesus' feet more, I feel convinced that I will be able to do that better.

Let me just add that this is not about just doing less. Mary is not necessarily lazily lounging about, sun-bathing or wasting time. (Not that there's anything wrong with either of those when needed!) She is sitting at Jesus' feet, listening to what he is saying. There was an old Jewish saying from around Jesus' time,

*"Let thy house be a meeting-house for the wise;  
and powder thyself in the dust of their feet;  
and drink their words with thirstiness."*

Rabbi Yose ben Yoezer (c 200BC)

The thought was that we should sit so closely to the wise (in this case Jesus) that the dust from his movements settles on us. Here's to getting less caught up in the distractions and more dusty!



# Remain in me

Circuit Service Message | John 15:1-8 | Rev Peter Hibberts

## 1. Online Service

**This week (24th July) our online circuit service will be led by Rev Peter Hibberts** and will be broadcast on the Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/NewarkSouthwellMethodistCircuit>) why not invite a friend to watch it with you and share the link with them on your social media or by email! (Also available to watch back at any time).

## 2. 'Zoom' Opportunities

If you're feeling isolated, are not ready to be face to face yet, or can't, but are happy to meet on Zoom, there is a weekly coffee time at 3pm on a Monday run by Charles Street but open to all, email Mel Watson for more details: [mellwatson42@gmail.com](mailto:mellwatson42@gmail.com).

There is also a weekly Zoom fellowship called 'The Gathering' which is part of Southwell Methodist Church and run by Philip and Francine Holmes. You'd be most welcome, contact Philip to connect: [philipholmes8100@gmail.com](mailto:philipholmes8100@gmail.com).

## 3. Radio Services

BBC Radio 4 ([Also online.](#))  
08:10am - 24th July

### Dwelling in Unity

A service making the start of the Commonwealth Games later this week in Birmingham with Birmingham Community Gospel Choir.

Leader and Director of Music:  
Maxine Brooks.

**T**his is the final of Jesus' 'I am' statements in John's gospel but also, in my opinion, the hardest, the most challenging and possibly the most painful. Rather than the focus being on what Jesus does for us, it's potentially about what we must do in relation to Jesus, with grave consequences.

In our first house we had a bench that Katie's Granny Heather bought for us. It was at the bottom of the garden, against a high garage wall and so I put a trellis up to train some climbing clematis; it was beautiful. Then, one day, I came out of the house to find that something was wrong. Some of the leaves were starting to curl up, they weren't as green as they had been and the flowers themselves were starting to die. I was gutted. It must have been some kind of disease or pest, or so I thought. Then I looked closer. I'm not sure how it had happened, but the stems, near the ground, had been severed. I had a beautiful arch of clematis that was gradually dying. There was no way for the water or the nutrients to get to the branches because they were not attached to the roots. There was nothing else I could do but to remove every one to the branches from the trellis, to uncurl every plant tie and pull off every dead branch, dead flower and dead leaf until the trellis was almost bare. They did grow back, the following year, but without the connection the clematis could not grow and could not produce the fruit (its flowers).

**What do you think fruit looks like for us?** Is it *personal* or about us as a *church*? Perhaps in answering that you turn to Galatians (the fruit of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control)? Perhaps as a church you turn to the five marks of the church's mission (evangelism, discipleship, service, justice and stewardship of creation)? Or perhaps the Methodist 'Calling' (Worship, Learning and Caring, Service, Evangelism)? Either way, we are called to have the open, honest self reflection and challenged to ask, are we bring fruitful? **Are you bearing fruit?** The measure is fruitfulness, the consequences are grave; that's the hard part to hear.

When our family went to France we visited a vineyard. We met the grower, we bought some beautiful wine, we drove between the fields, row on row of vines with the huge bunches of fruit hanging from their branches. These didn't come by accident. They were cultivated. There's no room in a vineyard for unfruitful branches. The first thing that happens is the dead branches, who have no future prospect of bearing fruit, are removed.

I want to be absolutely clear here, about what this is not saying. I don't believe this is referring to people who cannot take up an energetic act of service, for whatever reason, being removed from the church. Vines do not produce fruit all of the time, there are seasons, and in-season they produce fruit, out of season, they don't. We, personally, don't produce fruit all of the time. Actually I think those who cast themselves in a 'past it' phase of life are often mistaken. I hear lots of 'it's time for the next generation to take on x, y and z....' And in some roles that may be true (climbing a ladder and painting the ceiling for example) but fruit takes many forms and you don't grow too old to be fruitful. Prayer warriors, encouragers, befrienders, communicators, prophets - none of which require a healthy/fit body, just remaining in Christ!

What *is* Jesus talking about? Well, I'm not sure. What exactly is a branch in Jesus' metaphor? Is it a person, a church, an initiative, an activity? Perhaps it could be any or all of them. There are individuals in the New Testament Church who are 'removed' (dramatically) and there are also Churches who are 'removed' (look in Revelation). Equally sometimes folk move on to new ministries and this is clearly not removing, but sending! When we left our church in Stoke, to be *sent* to Newark and Southwell, we were prayed on our way with their blessing (we weren't cut off!)

But hear the individual and corporate warning: The Father, a good gardener, *does* remove branches that have no future prospect of fruitfulness. If he didn't, the fruitfulness would be impaired and he wouldn't be a good gardener. It's simple: If we don't bear fruit, we are a hindrance, we don't belong, we'll be removed. (Ouch!)

That stark warning aside, let's focus on pruning. What does pruning look like? In the hands of a skilled gardener, a tree that has ceased to bear fruit can be pruned and fed in such a way that, in time, it can produce fruit again.

If we, as churches, are branches, we need to allow God to tell us which parts of our ministry need to be trimmed back, pruned off, in order that the goodness that comes from the vine can be directed to the most fruitful areas. If you are a gardener, you don't just take off dead branches, sometimes you cut back the low yield branches. This too can be painful. (If we really enjoy that ministry or can't imagine church without it.) I felt the pain of my lost clematis but with the dead branches in situ, I couldn't effectively grow more in that space.

The manse garden has many fruit trees and bushes, but last year I focussed on the russet apples, pears and damsons in the front and the eating apple tree in the back, pruning each one hard. This year their yield, so far, looks to be far greater than in previous years, I think because I pruned hard.

Of course pruning a branch doesn't mean it's always been wrong, it was a mistake, it shouldn't have happened, it simply means it's not what God wants for *now*. Some things we do in the church need to be left in the past as well remembered, lovingly enjoyed things that no longer suit our mission. That too is painful, we loved those ways of doing things but if God is calling us to prune them off, we must be obedient, or we are not remaining in Jesus (and we know where that leads). We need brave, honest conversations and to support each other as we let go of some things.

My mum is the queen of the roast dinner, always has been. Our family roast dinners are epic. Mum spots different ways of cooking vegetables and loves to take them on. Problem is, when she spots a new way, she adds it onto the roast dinner menu but she never takes anything off. We used to joke that it was 'death by fifty vegetables.' (We may have exaggerated.) Much better would be to see a new idea and find an old one to rest at the same time (which doesn't mean that vegetable won't ever be cooked that way again, just that right now the focus is on something else).

And it isn't just Church that needs pruning, we need it to. What in our lives needs to be carefully pruned back to allow us to be more fruitful? What is God saying to you here?

Of course, none of this is our job really. It's the gardener that removes and prunes branches. So let me finish with what we must do: we must **remain in Jesus**.

Again there are a few things that this is not: It's not, remaining in each other (it's not purely a social thing and neither is church). It's not remaining in Methodism or in *any* church (being tied rigidly to tradition). It's not remaining in the community (making good works our focus). Jesus calls himself the *real* vine. There are imposters.

It's remaining in Jesus, making *him* host, letting *him* drive and receiving from *him*. The question we must constantly ask (in prayer, fellowship, worship, study and reflection) is **where are you Jesus?** And that's where we must root ourselves.

**Jesus is the real vine.**

## Prayer

Adapted from

[prayers4reparation.wordpress.com](http://prayers4reparation.wordpress.com):

*Lord Jesus, let us realise that every action of ours no matter how small or how secular enables us to be in touch with You. Let our interest lie not in created things - but only in absolute dependence upon Your presence in them. Let us pursue You and You alone through the reality of created things. Let this be our prayer - to become closer.*

*Let us become a true branch on the vine that is You, a branch that bears much fruit. Let us accept You in our lives in the way it pleases You to come into them: as Truth, to be spoken; as Life, to be lived; as Light, to be shared; as Love, to be followed; as Joy, to be given; as Peace, to be spread about; as Sacrifice, to be offered among our relatives and friends, among our neighbours and all people.*

Amen.

From [todaydevotional.com](http://todaydevotional.com):

*Jesus, you are the true vine, and we are your branches. By your grace and through the Holy Spirit, keep us connected to you so that we produce fruit that glorifies your Father.*

Amen

Graham Thomson, President of Methodist Conference and former minister in this circuit, has asked that people uphold him in prayer and if you would like to join an email prayer support and be informed of particular concerns and areas for prayer then please email Colin Beckett on [colin1244@gmail.com](mailto:colin1244@gmail.com) and he will keep you informed.

Colin also runs a more general email prayer chain, as part of Southwell Methodist Church. If you have prayer requests and have permission of all those they include, you can send them to Colin for distribution. You could also join his email list to receive requests for prayer. Do get in touch.

## Songs included in this week's online worship

Lord I come before your throne (StF 58) [LINK](#)

Men of faith rise up and sing [LINK](#)

You are the vine (StF 258) [LINK 1](#) [LINK 2](#)

A charge to keep I have (StF 658) [LINK](#)

*For YouTube songs click the LINK*

## Discussion Questions

Church is best done together but we know that this isn't always possible - particularly if you're housebound, isolated or even shielding. But why contact a friend and arrange to watch the church service online or read the newsletter simultaneously and get in touch by telephone afterwards to talk about it. Below are some questions that might help you to reflect together!

1. What do you think fruit looks like for us? (Individually or as a church.)
2. What does fruitfulness look like in your life? Are you bearing fruitful?
3. What is Jesus talking about when he describes the gardener removing branches?
4. What does pruning look like individually or as a church? What needs pruning?
5. Where are you noticing Jesus? How will you remain in him?
6. How will you sit at the feet of Jesus?

## In-person worship across the circuit for the next five weeks...

June-August 2022		24th July	31st July	7th Aug	14th Aug	21st Aug
Balderton	10.30am	A Trowbridge	Beech	Hucknall T	LA	Dalby
	Other			LA 4pm		
Charles Street	10.30am	West	N Falla HC	K Trowbridge	Hardy	Palling
	6pm	Sulston	Hart	at North End	N Falla HC	Bates
Collingham	10.45am	K Trowbridge	Hall HC / US	Morley	Hibberts	Bates HC
Elston	10.45am	Hucknall HC / T	Pearce		Ward T	
Hope Community	10.30am	Hardy at H'ville	N Falla SoP / at H'ville / 3pm	Dalby at B'gate	N Falla at H'ville / Breakfast / 9am	West at B'gate
Long Bennington	10.30am	N Falla HC	Winnington	Gibson	Adams	Hart HC
North End	6pm	N Falla HC	LA	Hibberts	LA	Gibson
North Muskham	10.30am	Hibberts	Hart		LA	
	2pm			Hibberts Café / HC		Ward Café / T
Southwell	10am	Ward	C Falla	Hibberts HC	Hart	LA MHA
	Other	Hibberts Fringe		Gibson 4pm		Hucknall HC / 4pm
Sutton-on-Trent	10.30am	United Service at Parish Church HC / 10am	LA at Tuxford Cafe / 2pm	Winnington US	LA Breakfast / 09am	Gibson HC / US

The new Circuit Preaching Plan is now available from the circuit website (where you will find all service details):

[www.newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk](http://www.newarkandsouthwellmethodist.org.uk)  
or contact your local church.

**If you haven't been in-person for a while, maybe it's time.**

## TOGETHER IS CHANGING (see Together go for full details)

For the month of August, TOGETHER will stop completely, but the weekly Worship at home material produced by the Methodist Church will be provided with a bulk mailing sent out with the final weekly TOGETHER at the end of July. This also means that the often specifically produced Circuit YouTube service will stop, with the online offering either being streamed live from Charles Street or using the recorded service produced for Balderton online. It is hoped that these changes will release the ministers to focus on other priorities whilst also being committed to enabling those who are housebound to feel connected to church but in a different way.

Our thanks to all those who have contributed to TOGETHER by writing articles, preparing envelopes, folding and posting out TOGETHER. We will see where the future takes us.

*The Together Team.*