

St James' Church, Weybridge

Trinity 18 Proper 22 Yr B, Sunday 4 October 2026

Introduction and Call to Worship

Only through Christ are we truly free, fulfilled and our gifts realised. As we prepare for today's liturgy, we offer ourselves back to the God who made us, knows us and loves us.

Today's Readings

First Reading Isaiah 5:1-7

A vineyard yields wild instead of productive grapes. It is broken and trampled down, and God even commands the clouds not to rain upon it.

Gospel Matthew 21:33-46

Jesus tells the parable of the landowner who leased his vineyard to tenants. He then quotes Psalm 118: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," before telling his listeners that the kingdom of God will be taken from them and given to people who are fruitful in their faith.

HOMILY

"The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." (Matthew 21:42)

The Collect for today:

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us your gift of faith that, forsaking what lies behind and reaching out to that which is before,
we may run the way of your commandments and win the crown of everlasting joy; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

This past week, I have been attending the third part of the Church of England's Incumbent Leadership Programme, based at Ripon College, Cuddesdon, Oxford. Our priorities for study this session were highly forward-looking: AI, the digital generation, understanding Generation Z, youth work, leading collaboratively, supervision, line management, life-long faith, and developing teams.

I have always believed that people working together in teams, pooling diverse gifts, talents, and abilities, offer the best opportunity for discerning God's call on our lives. Through the shared activities of prayer, worship, and fellowship, we discern what the Spirit is saying to the church today—especially in a world where rapid technological challenge and dramatic cultural change are all around us. The Scriptures, our beautiful church tradition, and our ability to reason form the foundational root from which we grow. This growth happens in our relationship with God, who loves us first and longs for us to reach our full potential, but it also happens corporately as we seek to transform the Church to meet the needs of a changing world.

We start this transformation when we first recognise and respect the things that make us different, understanding that diversity is a core strength. Our unique ideas, hopes, concerns, longings, joys, and even the different ways in which we read and understand the Bible—they all matter as we bring to God all we are, all we have been, and all we will be. Growing our teams of people who serve with generosity and joy is vital for the future of St James' Church and the building of God's kingdom in Weybridge. I hope

and pray more people will feel called to be part of that missional activity, especially as we seek to engage more deeply with families, children, and the younger generations who often look at the world through a very different lens.

I am so deeply thankful for each of you and all that you bring to our church community. Thank you for being here, and for simply being you. You really are the most inspiring, lovely people, and it is a profound blessing to worship here, to know you, and to love you all.

Seeing people grow—recognising God's presence in each other—is about being Christ-like; it is catholic, sacramental, rooted in truth, and driven by justice. This collaborative approach stands in sharp contrast to the leadership offered by the religious authorities of our Lord's time, whom Jesus challenges directly through his parables. In today's Gospel, the wicked tenants fail to recognise a fellow human being or see God's likeness in them. Instead, they see people merely as transactional assets to exploit, or as obstacles standing in the way of their own ambitions.

Worst of all, they try to possess something that does not belong to them in the first place. Their judgement is clouded by selfish ambition, greed, and falsehood. Deceived by their own desires, they go so far as to kill the landowner's son. It is a harsh parable, full of "them and us" dynamics, with good and bad, right and wrong, laid out in stark, black-and-white language.

As people who follow Christ, we reject that transactional view of humanity. We believe that life is a precious gift and that all people are made in the image of the Creator—made only a little lower than the angels, dearly loved, and called by name.

I am convinced that God's very presence is made manifest through the lives of faithful people whose moral goodness, unending compassion, and divine spark of love brings hope, order, and deep relationship into the world. In this church, we have many teams striving across various aspects of community life to realise our vision, rooted in an inclusive call to make the love of God known to everyone. This is not "my way or the highway," but God's way: broad, high, wide, transformative, and life-giving.

Admittedly, it can be hard to love others when we don't always recognise that God-presence in our own lives first. It is equally difficult when we begin to view the church merely as "work" or an item on our to-do list. To serve, to be an active disciple, is to be a life-long learner in the school of Christ. Being in a relationship of loving service is a gift, not a burden. We can view volunteering simply as joining a rota and making a duty-bound commitment. Or a better way is to see that rota and that commitment as a vehicle for growing our relationship with God and one another, sharing in the joyful task of building up the Kingdom.

There are so many ways in which we can serve. How might God be calling you to serve in the vineyard of the Kingdom, where all are loved, forgiven, and included? Our Lord reminds us that the rejected stone goes on to become the cornerstone. Sometimes, the things or the people we are quickest to dismiss—whether it is a new piece of technology like AI, or a younger generation whose culture we don't quite understand—are exactly where God is inviting us to build. When we refuse to hear God's call or fail to recognise His presence in the unfamiliar, we risk missing a crucial part of His plan.

Making sure we pray daily is essential as we reflect on how acts of love, courage, generosity, and faithfulness—true kingdom values—strengthen our growth in faith. Joining a small group is another wonderful way of plugging into the life of discipleship. This past year of additional study has really helped

me to reflect more deeply upon the way I lead, reinforcing my desire to lead with a heart for collaboration, releasing your unique gifts, and seeking to build the Kingdom together here in Weybridge.

Because God entrusts the vineyard to us—not for us to use selfishly, but for us to tend with generosity and joy for a season - it belongs entirely to Him. Our active teams of people are an outward expression of God’s living activity at the heart of Weybridge. I long to see that ministry grow as we share our gifts generously, living out our call to love everyone.

Therefore, we pray:

Forsaking what lies behind
and reaching out to that which is before,
we may run the way of your commandments
and win the crown of everlasting joy;
Amen.

Father Damian Harrison-Miles, October 2026