Sermon:

Read last verse of hymn below – easy to sing but how do we give ourselves to God when things are uncertain? Some folk are naturally trusting/optimistic – “she’ll be right” attitude. For them ‘Trust & Obey’ is enough. For others ‘Blessed Assurance’ is needed!

John 15 tells of a vine. If we remain in the vine we can be fruitful, for Christ’s life flows through us.

In the Methodist Connexion all branches linked in theory, not so good in practice – often churches act as though they are different vines in same vineyard! John 15 often used to urge connection to the denomination (attendance at Synods, etc) or to a church, but it is really about connection to Christ.

Being connected is about Christ’s lifeblood in our daily lives, more than signing up to join a church.

Vine exists not for its own sake but for the fruit it bears – what fruit does God want *us* to bear?

As we renew our Covenant we reaffirm our allegiance & trust. And we sign up for God’s pruning (last year I heavily pruned roses– better for it, but for the roses it was painful and uncertain). It is what is needed to let the sap to flow better, and get a healthier plant.

Could it be that God might call us to prune something we hold dear so his sap can flow better and the parish be more healthy and fruitful?

This year I want to focus on our links with the community. Where does our Affordables shop fit in? Do we close down completely, or keep looking for other premises? Is this a pruning issue?

We have a temporary solution with a still uncertain future, but this gives us more time to discern what God wants.

May God grant us courage to face the future, even making uncomfortable decisions along the way. It is Vine & Branches, & Covenant that gives purpose in a drifting world. Not easy but, as with the temporary fix for Affordables, it can be surprising!

The vine is Christ, and we his branches are,

to bear good fruit his life through us must flow;

when cut from him, there is no fruitful life,

to stay with him, the only way to grow.

God is the gardener, he will tend the vine;

he breaks off branches that no harvest bear.

He also prunes the ones which are of worth,

that by this cleansing they have more to share.

As we renew our covenant with God,

we seek for Christ’s renewal day by day,

we strive to be disciples of the Lord,
a parish living in a Christ-like way.

So take us, Lord, imperfect though we are,

uncertain what your future has in store;

to you we give this parish and our lives,
the Father, Son, and Spirit we adore.

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