**Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year B May 2, 2021**

**INTRODUCTION**

*This Sunday’s image of how the risen Christ shares his life with us is the image of the vine. Christ the vine and we the branches are alive in each other, in the mystery of mutual abiding described in the gospel and the first letter of John. Baptism makes us a part of Christ’s living and life-giving self and makes us alive with Christ’s life. As the vine brings food to the branches, Christ feeds us at his table. We are sent out to bear fruit for the life of the world.*

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

O God, form the minds of your faithful people into a single will. Make us love what you command and desire what you promise, that, amid all the changes of this world, our hearts may be fixed where true joy is found: through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Prayer of the Day**

O God, you give us your Son as the vine apart from whom we cannot live. Nourish our life in his resurrection, that we may bear the fruit of love and know the fullness of your joy, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**Psalm 22:24-31**

24My praise is of him in the great assembly;

I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship him.

**25The poor shall eat and be satisfied, and those who seek the Lord shall praise him:**

**“May your heart live forever!”**

26All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord,

and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.

**27For kingship belongs to the Lord; he rules over the nations.**

28To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship;

all who go down to the dust fall before him.

**29My soul shall live for him; my descendants shall serve him;**

**they shall be known as the Lord’s forever.**

30They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn the saving deeds that he has done.

Father, when your Son was handed over to torture and felt abandoned by you, he cried out from the cross. Then death was destroyed and life was restored. By his death and resurrection save the poor, lift up the downtrodden, break the chains of the oppressed, that your Church may sing your praises; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

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**First Reading: Acts 8:26-40**

*Led by the Spirit, Philip encounters an Ethiopian official who is returning to his African home after having been to Jerusalem to worship. Philip uses their encounter to proclaim the gospel to him. Upon coming to faith in Jesus, he is baptized by Philip.*

26An angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) 27So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” 30So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” 31He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. 32Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:
 “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
   so he does not open his mouth.
 33In his humiliation justice was denied him.
  Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”
34The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” 35Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. 36As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” 38He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. 39When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. 40But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

**Background**

This chapter from v. 4 onward deals with the ministry of Philip the deacon (not to be confused with Philip the Apostle.) Philip’s place among the seven deacons is listed in 6:5-6: *What [the apostles] said pleased the whole community, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.* 6They had these men stand before the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them. Stephen has already been martyred (6:8-8:1) Philip, in the dispersal following Saul/Paul’s persecution (8:1b-3), preached and exorcized and healed in Samaria (8:4-13) and the apostles in Jerusalem sent Peter and John to Samaria, and upon their prayers the Samaritan believers received the Holy Spirit. Peter and John returned to Jerusalem, preaching in many Samaritan villages on the way. These ministries begin to fulfill Jesus’ words in 1:8 *- and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*

**Versee by Verse**

**26An angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up** *(Gk. anastethi – rise up, stand up)* **and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness** *(GK. eremos – desolate, waste, desert)* **road.)***South and east of Jerusalem. It seems Philip is still in Samaria – north and west of Jerusalem.*

**27So he got up and went. Now** *(Gk. idou – behold!)* **there was** *(Gk. inserts aner – a man)***an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official** *(Gk. dynastes – one with power)* **of the Candace,** *(a title, not a name)* **queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury.** *(This confirms his position of power)***He had come to Jerusalem to worship***(As a eunuch he could not be a Jew or a proselyte Deut. 23:1* 1No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. But he could worship in the Court of the Gentiles – the outer court of the Temple)

**28and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.***(Not only a person of power, but also of wealth – to own a scroll of the prophet! – and literate!)*

**29Then the Spirit** *(Holy Spirit)* **said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.”**

**30So Philip ran up to it** *(Gk. prosdramon – run to –Philip wastes no time!)* **and heard him reading** *(He would have been reading aloud – people did not read silently in those days.)* **the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”**

**31He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.** *(This would be a large, fairly comfortable vehicle)*

**32Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:** *(Isaiah 53:7-8)* **“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
   so he does not open his mouth.
 33In his humiliation justice was denied him.
  Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”**

**34The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”***What a great opening!!*

**35Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.***Too bad the writer doesn’t insert the text of Philip’s proclamation!*

**36As they were going along the road,** *(not only a large, comfortable vehicle, but one with a driver)* **they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water!** *(Gk. Idou hydor – Behold! Water)* **What is to prevent me from being baptized?”** *(It’s fairly clear he had heard something of how one became a follower of Jesus. He also knew that his physical condition prevented him from becoming a Jew.)*

*Other ancient authorities add v. 37: And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he replied, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”*

**38He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.**

**39When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.**

**40But Philip found himself at Azotus,** *(some 22 miles north of Gaza on the Mediterranean coast)* **and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.**

*(This would be Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast – a distance of over 50 miles. And according to 21:8 he stayed there and raised a family.)*

**Theology: God provides opportunities to share the good news. But we need to be alert to recognize and respond to them, and not assume someone would not be receptive or open.**

**Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year B May 2, 2021**

**Second Reading: 1 John 4:7-21**

*We love God and others because God first loved us. We cannot say we love God, whom we have not seen, while hating fellow Christians, whom we regularly see. Love toward God is to be matched by love toward others because the essence of God is love.*

7Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.
  13By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 15God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.
  God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. 17Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. 18There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. 19We love because he first loved us. 20Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. 21The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

**Background**

From Werner’s presentation:

Since the 5th century AD, these 3 books (the letters of John) were included in all copies listing the canon of the New Testament. Codex Sinaiticus (4th cent.) contains them. The Council of Carthage (AD 397) gave a list including them as accepted scripture. They are also listed in a “Festal Letter” of Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, as an Easter greeting to fellow bishops ((AD 367). The books were regarded as coming from the pen of “John”, who was assumed to be the author of the Fourth Gospel, and identified as the disciple whom Jesus loved. (John 21:20). We need to remember that the ancients were more concerned with establishing authority for their writings than actual authorship.

Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, in 108 AD quotes from I John 4:2, but the earliest reference to I John is in the letter of Clement if Rome to the church at Corinth (AD 96) where he twice uses the phrase “made perfect in love” (I John 2:5; 4:18). *Which seems to indicate composition in the last decade of the first century AD*

**Verse by Verse**

**7Beloved,** *(Gk. agapetomen – agape love through this passage)* **let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of** *(Gk. gegennetai – born or begotten)* **God and knows God.**

**8Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.**

**9God’s love was revealed** *(Gk. ephanerothe – made manifest, clear, visible)* **among us in this way: God sent his only** *(Gk. monogene – only begotten)* **Son into the world so that we might live through him.**

**10In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice** *(Gk. hilasmon – only here and 2:2 in the NT)*  **for our sins.***(2:2 - and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.)*

**11Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another.**

**12No one has ever** *(Gk. popote – at any time once in Luke, 4 in John and once here)* **seen God;** *(John 1:18, 6:46)* **if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected** *(Gk. teteleiomene – completed, accomplished, consummated)* **in us.**

 **13By this we know that we abide** *(Gk. menomen – stay, remain dwell)* **in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.**

**14And we have seen and do testify** *(Gk. martyroumen – give witness)* **that the Father has sent his Son** *(Gk. ton Huion – the Son)* **as the Savior of the world.***(Gk. kosmon – created order)*

**15God abides in those who confess** *(Gk. homologese – agree, lit. speak the same)* **that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God.**

**16So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.
  God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.**

**17Love has been perfected** *(Gk. teteleiomene – completed, accomplished, consummated)* **among us in this: that we may have boldness** *(Gk. parresian – outspokenness, confidence, bluntness, assurance)* **on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world.**

**18There is no fear** *(Gk. phobos)*  **in love, but perfect love casts out** *Gk. exo ballei)* **fear; for fear has to do with punishment,** *(Gk. kolasin – torment, chastisement)* **and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.**

**19We love** *(could also be translated, “Let us love)* **because he first loved us.**

**20Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers [or sisters,] are liars;** *(Gk. pseustes – liars deceivers, falsifiers)* **for those who do not love a brother [or sister] whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.**

**21The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers [and sisters] also.** *John 13:34-35* 34I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. 35By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

**Theology: And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,**

 **Yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love.**

**Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year B May 2, 2021**

**Gospel: John 15:1-8**

*On the night of his arrest, Jesus taught his disciples about the relationship they would have with him. Those who abide in his word and love bear fruit, for apart from him, they can do nothing.*

[Jesus says:] 1“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. 2He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. 3You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 4Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 5I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. 6Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

**Background**

Chapters 15-17, Jesus’ farewell speech(s) come between 14:31 “Rise, let us be on our way.” and 18:1 After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples. Many commentators believe that 15-17 were added later – either by the same author or an editor from the same community. (Brown: The Community of the Beloved Disciple).

**Verse by Verse**

**[Jesus says:] 1“I AM** *(Gk. ego eimi)* **the true** *(Gk. alethine)* **vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.***(Gk. georgos – land worker, farmer) In the OT the grapevine is a metaphor for Israel – Ps. 80:8-16, Isaiah 5:1-7, 27:2-6, Jeremiah 2:21, Ezekiel 15:1-6, 17:5-10, 19:10-14*

*In John, the I AM statements affirm and underline Jesus’ identity as God – always referring to Exodus 3:14.*

**2He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes** *(Gk. kathairei – prunes, cleanses – see below – only NT use))* **to make it bear more fruit.**

*Well-tended vineyards are pruned back to the bare stem (around here that’s usually done in late winter) since it is the new growth that produces the beat grapes.*

*Bruner: The Lord’s own deepest pruning was the Cross; faithful disciples, too, it is promised, again and again in the Gospels, will have their crosses or prunings. But in three days, the harvest of the empty grave and the reality of Life followed Jesus’ Cross. Something comparably miraculous and fruitful waits on the other side of every faithful disciple’s prunings and crosses. This is the gospel in our verse. P. 880*

**3You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.**

**4Abide** *(Gk. meinate – stay, remain dwell)* **in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.** *F.D.Bruner translates “abide” as “make your home”*

**5I AM** *(Gk. ego eimi)* **the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.**

**6Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.**

**7If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.**

*Note, this is not a blank check. The “If” or “as long as” give the conditions for the asking.*

**8My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”**

**Theology: This is how we live as faithful disciples: by opening our lives to invite Jesus to make his home in us, and to make our home in him.**