



## FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

2018 April 29



St Paul's Episcopal Church  
Canton Ohio ♦ USA

True Vine [photograph]

June 3, 2004, Fairfield, Moteueka, New Zealand

<http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=54148>

### The Col-lect: Year (cycle): B

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

*People:* And also with you.

Celebrant: Let us pray.

Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

**A Note on the Collect:** The text of the appointed Collect traces its roots back to Cranmer’s 1549 BCP where it was used for the Feast Day of St. Philip and St. James. With the 1662 revision, the Result Clause was expanded to include the phrase, “...that we may steadfastly follow his footsteps in the way that leads to eternal life.” The Collect continued as part of the Feast Day Service through the 1928 BCP before being transferred to its present location in the 1979 edition.<sup>1</sup> - pg. 11

**R**eadings  
Year B  
Sunday, 29 April 2018

**The Lessons Appointed for Use begin on Page**

Acts 8:26-40	Could the Eunuch be a Diaspora Jew, dispersed in the 6 <sup>th</sup> century after the Babylonians had conquered the Israelites?	4
Psalms 22:24-30	Bridging the us/them divide	7
1 John 4:7-21	Love that transcends and overcomes	8
John 15:1-8	A community remaining together	10

**The First Lesson: Acts 8:26-40**

<sup>1</sup>And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria. <sup>2</sup>Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him. <sup>3</sup>But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison.

<sup>4</sup> Now those who were scattered went from place to place, proclaiming the word. <sup>5</sup>Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. <sup>6</sup>The crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip, hearing and seeing the signs that he did, <sup>7</sup>for unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, came out of many who were possessed; and many others who were paralysed or lame were cured. <sup>8</sup>So there was great joy in that city.

<sup>9</sup> Now a certain man named Simon had previously practised magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he was

someone great. <sup>10</sup>All of them, from the least to the greatest, listened to him eagerly, saying, 'This man is the power of God that is called Great.' <sup>11</sup>And they listened eagerly to him because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. <sup>12</sup>But when they believed Philip, who was proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. <sup>13</sup>Even Simon himself believed. After being baptized, he stayed constantly with Philip and was amazed when he saw the signs and great miracles that took place.

<sup>14</sup>Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them. <sup>15</sup>The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit <sup>16</sup>(for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus). <sup>17</sup>Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. <sup>18</sup>Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, <sup>19</sup>saying, 'Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.' <sup>20</sup>But Peter said to him, 'May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money! <sup>21</sup>You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God. <sup>22</sup>Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. <sup>23</sup>For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness.' <sup>24</sup>Simon answered, 'Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me.'

<sup>25</sup>Now after Peter and John had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, proclaiming the good news to many villages of the Samaritans.

<http://bible.oremus.org/?passage=Acts+8>

**Introduction to verses 26-40:** There are few passages in Acts where there is as much going on as there is in these few verses. On the surface, this is a story of the conversion of the eunuch (who does not get a name) by Philip. But there is so much more going on than that. There is the spatial dimension: the eunuch is traveling from Jerusalem to Gaza. Then there is the political dimension: he is a foreigner, and a highly-placed one at that, serving in the court of the queen of the Ethiopians.

There is the economic dimension: he is in charge of the treasury, and being conveyed on a chariot (with room for a guest), which suggests that he was a person of some means. And then there are the dimensions of gender and sexuality: this person is a eunuch.

That is a lot to have going on in one passage. And it presents a magnificent set of options for the exegete. It makes me want to start with a question I often find myself asking: Why is this text in the bible? What is meant by the inclusion of this tale, particularly with all its details? It would have been easier, I presume, for Luke (the author of Acts) to leave this story out or simplify it by editing out the specifics, but he keeps it in with all its complexity.

I wonder if it could be as simple as this: we are meant to encounter this Ethiopian eunuch in all of his personhood. We are supposed to meet him in the multiplicity of his identities, in the same way we all hope to be met in the multiplicity of our identities.<sup>2</sup>

26

**T**hen an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ (This is a wilderness road.)<sup>27</sup> So 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<sup>28</sup> and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.<sup>29</sup> Then the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over to this chariot and join it.’<sup>30</sup> So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’<sup>31</sup> He replied, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.<sup>32</sup> Now 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.

<sup>33</sup> In his humiliation justice was denied him.  
Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.’ [Is. 53:7-8]

<sup>34</sup> The eunuch asked Philip, ‘About whom, may I ask you, does

the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’<sup>35</sup> Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.<sup>36</sup> As 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?’<sup>38</sup> He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.<sup>39</sup> When 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.<sup>40</sup> But 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.

The Word of the Lord  
*Thanks be to God*

**The Response:**

**Psalm: 22:24-30**

*Deus, Deus meus*

<sup>1</sup> MY GOD, MY GOD, look upon me; why hast thou forsaken me \*  
and art so far from my health, and from the words of my  
complaint?

<sup>2</sup> O my God, I cry in the day-time, but thou hearest not \*  
and in the night-season also I take no rest.

<sup>3</sup> And thou continuest holy \* O thou worship of Israel.

<sup>4</sup> Our fathers hoped in thee, they trusted in thee, and thou didst  
deliver them.

<sup>5</sup> They called upon thee, and were holpen \* they put their trust in  
thee, and were not confounded.

<sup>6</sup> But as for me, I am a worm, and no man \* a very scorn of men,  
and the out-cast of the people.

<sup>7</sup> All they that see me laugh me to scorn \* they shoot out their lips,  
and shake their heads, saying,

<sup>8</sup> He trusted in God, that he would deliver him \*  
let him deliver him, if he will have him.

<sup>9</sup> But thou art he that took me out of my mother’s womb \*  
thou wast my hope, when I hanged yet upon my mother’s breasts.

<sup>10</sup> I have been left unto thee ever since I was born \* thou art my God even from my mother's womb.

<sup>11</sup> O go not from me, for trouble is hard at hand \* and there is none to help me.

<sup>12</sup> Many oxen are come about me \* fat bulls of Basan close me in on every side. <sup>13</sup> They gape upon me with their mouths \* as it were a ramping and a roaring lion.

<sup>14</sup> I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint \* my heart also in the midst of my body is even like melting wax.

<sup>15</sup> My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaveth to my gums \* and thou shalt bring me into the dust of death.

<sup>16</sup> For many dogs are come about me \* and the council of the wicked layeth siege against me.

<sup>17</sup> They pierced my hands and my feet; I may tell all my bones \* they stand staring and looking upon me.

<sup>18</sup> They part my garments among them \* and cast lots upon my vesture.

<sup>19</sup> But be not thou far from me, O Lord \* thou art my succour, haste thee to help me.

<sup>20</sup> Deliver my soul from the sword \* my darling from the power of the dog.

<sup>21</sup> Save me from the lion's mouth \* thou hast heard me also from among the horns of the unicorns.

<sup>22</sup> I will declare thy Name unto my brethren \* in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.

<sup>23</sup> O PRAISE THE LORD, ye that fear him \* magnify him, all ye of the seed of Jacob, and fear him, all ye seed of Israel;

<sup>24</sup> For he hath not despised, nor abhorred, the low estate of the poor \* he hath not hid his face from him, but when he called unto him he heard him.

from the 1662 BCP, Coverdale Psalms, *Oremus Bible Browser*  
<http://www.missionstclare.com/english/psalm/psalters.html>

**Introduction to verses 24-30:** This psalm reveals the universalistic streak that Judaism had. This psalm points to the God of Israel as the God of everyone—everyone who has been, and everyone who is to come. It doesn't get much more universal than that.<sup>2</sup>

24-30

**M**y praise is of him in the great assembly; \*  
I will perform my vows in the presence of  
those who worship him.

<sup>25</sup> The poor shall eat and be satisfied,  
and those who seek the Lord shall praise him: \*

"May your heart live for ever!"

<sup>26</sup> All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, \*  
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.

<sup>27</sup> For kingship belongs to the Lord; \*  
he rules over the nations.

<sup>28</sup> To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship; \*  
all who go down to the dust fall before him.

<sup>29</sup> My soul shall live for him;  
my descendants shall serve him; \*  
they shall be known as the Lord's for ever.

<sup>30</sup> They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn \*  
the saving deeds that he has done.



## The Epistle:

## 1 John 4:7-21

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. <sup>2</sup> By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, <sup>3</sup> and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming; and now it is already in the world. <sup>4</sup> Little children, you are from God, and have conquered them; for the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. <sup>5</sup> They are from the world; therefore what they say is from the world, and the world listens to them. <sup>6</sup> We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. <sup>3</sup>

**Introduction to verses 7-21:** This is about the love of God, and the way God’s love is manifested among people.

There are three Greek words for *love*: Eros – Philia – Agape. This passage is talking about *agape*. Preachers and commentary-writers alike can sometimes make too much of the distinctions between these three words for love and their uses, but in this case, knowing that it’s *agape* can actually make a difference. This is a deep love. This is a powerful thing that 1 John is evoking—a love that transcends and overcomes.

When paired with the psalm and the Acts texts above, this text from 1 John becomes a very powerful word. “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear....” Indeed.

This is not just about piety towards God. Look at verse 21. “Those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.” *Must*. Loving God is all well and good, but that’s the easy part. Loving each other is much more difficult. Loving God is a piece of cake compared to loving your enemies—as Jesus liked to remind us.

What prompted the author to write these words in 1 John? And could that situation have been much different from what your congregation is facing today? <sup>2</sup>

**7-21**

**B**eloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup>God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup>In 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. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

<sup>13</sup>By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup>And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. <sup>15</sup>God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they

abide in God. <sup>16</sup>So 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. <sup>17</sup>Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. <sup>18</sup>There 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. <sup>19</sup>We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup>Those 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. <sup>21</sup>The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

The Word of the Lord

*Thanks be to God*



**The Gospel:**

**John 15:1-8**

**Introduction:** This passage is in sharp contrast to the others for today’s lectionary. Where those are inclusive and emphasize God’s encompassing love, this passage emphasizes an almost ruthless efficiency on God’s part: “Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.” Sheesh. That’s pretty harsh. That kind of no-nonsense approach might work in viticulture or other kinds of horticulture, but it feels pretty draconian when applied to persons.

From the beginning, Christianity has allowed room for multiple visions of God’s ultimate designs. On one end of the spectrum, God “saves” relatively few, and the rest are condemned to oblivion, or worse, eternal punishment. On the other end of the spectrum, you find ideas like *Origen of Alexandria’s apokatastasis*, where all are ultimately redeemed. And, of course, there are many positions in the middle. This passage from John would seem to give evidence for the former, harsher position. But the metaphor of a vine and a vine-tender can also be a metaphor that speaks to care and cultivation. The difference is in how

it's read. And the beauty of scripture is that it allows multiple readings. Jesus often spoke this way: not in lectures, where we are simply to accept information, but in semi-riddles, where we are asked to find our own meanings of out less-than-clear words.

Notice the shift in pronouns. When Jesus is talking about the bad branches, it's "them" language. When Jesus is talking about the good, fruit-bearing branches, it's "you" language. And the Greek is plural ("y'all remain in me," as the superior second person plural option among American dialects puts it), so this isn't about individual piety or righteousness. This is a communal message about those who remain—together—as a part of the vine.<sup>2</sup>

**I** am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. <sup>2</sup>He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>Abide 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. <sup>5</sup>I 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. <sup>6</sup>Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

The Gospel of the Lord  
*All praise to you, Lord Christ.*



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The Collects, Psalms and Canticles are from the Book of Common Prayer, 1979.  
<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/lectionary/fifth-sunday-easter-0>

## Notes:

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<sup>1</sup> Our respective spiritual journeys reflect a variety of experiences and epiphanic awakenings to God's presence. The promise that in perfectly knowing God we will have everlasting life is an extraordinarily fulfilling statement. Just to be sure that we "got the message" the same thought is reiterated in the just quoted Result Clause whereby the emulation of God's steadfast love – *chesed*<sup>a</sup> – will lead us to eternal life. Jesus, in that beautiful and at times frustrating dialogue with Thomas and Philip - before the latter's enlightenment - recorded in John 14:6 gave us forever Christ's assurance: "I am the way, the truth, and the life." <sup>a</sup>(*chesed* [KHesad] -In Judaism, the attribute of grace, benevolence, or compassion, especially (in Kabbalism) as one of the sephiroth - *emanation*.)

<http://trinityconcord.org/CollectCommentaries/Easter5A.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/lectio/2015/04/eunuchs-vines-and-love-the-lectionary-for-the-fifth-sunday-of-easter/> April 26, 2015 by Eric Smith.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+John+4%3A1-6&version=NRSV>



## The Holy Spirit in Acts

When they came to some water, he asked, "What prevents me from being baptized?" Verse 37 is in some versions, but not others. In the NAU verse 37 says, "And Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he answered and said, 'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.'" According to Bruce (p. 190), this verse "certainly reflects primitive Christian practice." The eunuch stopped the chariot and Philip baptized him in water.

When Philip and the Ethiopian came up out of the water, "the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away." The Ethiopian did not see him any more. Philip found himself at Azotus, which was 20 miles north of Gaza. From Azotus Philip traveled north to Caesarea. As he traveled, he kept preaching the gospel to all the cities until he came to Caesarea. We find him in Caesarea twenty years later. He is known by Luke (Acts 21:8) as "Philip the evangelist." He is the father of four daughters who prophesied.

The Ethiopian went away from the experience "rejoicing." Luke does not say anything about receiving the Spirit, but joy is a part of the work that the Spirit performs. When disciples (Acts 13:52) see spiritual

results, they often have an accompanying joy. It is Paul, however, who writes about joy as a fruit of the Spirit.

The ministry of Philip brought about the expansion of the church. Jesus said that empowered disciples would be witnesses in Samaria and to the uttermost part of the globe. Philip ministered in Samaria and to the Ethiopian who, in turn, no doubt witnessed at home in Ethiopia. According to Gangel (p. 128):

This double-barreled record of Philip's ministry is a potent part of Luke's gospel story. First, the gospel to the hated Samaritans, a half-breed race with distorted theology in the eyes of the good Palestinian Jews. Now, a Gentile secular official from a foreign land will take Jesus home with him. The church of Jesus Christ began sending missionaries to Africa almost two thousand years ago. The first was an African, a high government official, possibly a man with physical limitations.

### **Conclusion**

The breakthrough of the gospel among the Gentiles, experienced at the house of Cornelius, was nearing. The gospel reached Samaria and then this Ethiopian eunuch. The Spirit of God in all these cases was powerfully at work.

George M. Flattery

<http://globalchristiancenter.com/holy-spirit-studies/the-holy-spirit-in-acts/664-acts-8-26-40>

### **For Further Study**

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