

Note: This is a fuller version than that which was preached on Sunday. +PW

EASTER 5

Acts 8:26-40

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

Then 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.) 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 and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it.' So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. 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.
In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth.'

The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?' Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. 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?' He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. 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. 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.

Psalms 22:26-32

The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the LORD.
May your hearts live for ever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the LORD;
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.
For dominion belongs to the LORD,
and he rules over the nations.

To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,

and I shall live for him.
Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.

1 John 4:7-21

God Is Love

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 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. 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. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 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. 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. 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. We love because he first loved us. 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. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

John 15:1-8

Jesus the True Vine

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

One Another

In this Easter season we trace developments among those who believed in Jesus, or came to believe in him, following his death and resurrection. Today we read from the Acts of the Apostles of the somewhat miraculous meeting between Philip, of whom you will hear more next week when celebrating your patronal festival, and a Eunuch returning from his visit to Jerusalem to his high status position in the court of the Queen in Ethiopia. As a result of reading the prophet Isaiah, he was Baptized by Philip thus becoming a follower of Jesus himself.

In the same period of the post-Easter early church taking shape John, among others, wrote letters of instruction, explanation, and encouragement. In the portion of his letter we read today, he tells on the importance of love, and of Christians loving one another.

Verse 7 Beloved, let us love **one another**, because love is from God.

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

Verse 12if we love **one another**, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Verse 21 The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also – in other words – **one another**.

I am sure you will have noticed John's use of the words 'one another'. The New Testament has many references about followers of Christ relating to one another, in more ways than just the cover-all of 'love'.

This, of course, stems from the teaching by Jesus himself. In John 15.12-13 we read:

'This is my commandment, that you **love one another** as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.'

Also in John 13.34-35 – we often read this just before Easter when reminded of the death and resurrection of Jesus – a measure of his love and a standard for our love.

Jesus said: 'I give you a new commandment, that **you love one another**. Just as I have loved you, you also should **love one another**. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you *have love for one another*.'

The good news is that these, through the ages, have been and continue to be obeyed and expressed.

It was said of the early Christians – see how they love **one another**

I want to outline for you a sample of verses that speak of how to live together as members of the Body of Christ.

Romans 12.5

New Testament writers knew: '...we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually **we are members one of another**.'

Mark 9.50

'....**be at peace with one another**.'

Romans 12.10-16 (An extended example worthy of reading in full)

'...love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony **with one another**; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.'

Romans 16.16

'Greet one another with a holy kiss.'

1Corinthians 11.33-34

'.....when you come together to eat, wait for one another.'

Galatians 5.13-15 (This one comes with a warning.)

'For you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but through love become slaves to one another. For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' **If, however, you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another.'**

Ephesians 4.1-3

I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, **bearing with one another in love**, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Ephesians 4.31-32

Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice, and **be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another**, as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Colossians 3.12-15

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. **Bear with one another** and, if anyone has a complaint against another, **forgive each other**; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful.

1Thessalonians 5.11

Therefore **encourage one another and build up each other**, as indeed you are doing.

Hebrews 3.13

But ***exhort one another every day***, as long as it is called 'today', so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 10.24-25

And let us consider how to ***provoke one another to love and good deeds***, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging ***one another***, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

James 5.16

Therefore ***confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another***, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.

1 Peter 4.8-11

Above all, ***maintain constant love for one another***, for love covers a multitude of sins. ***Be hospitable to one another without complaining***. Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, ***serve one another with whatever gift each of you has received***. Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the very words of God; whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies, so that God may be glorified in all things through Jesus Christ. To him belong the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

1 Corinthians 12.25(b)

.. care for one another.

As well as understanding the Church to be the 'Body of Christ', where each is a member of the other in love and mutual interdependence, Jesus, in speaking to his followers about following him, uses the analogy of a grape vine and branches: he is the vine, we are the branches. We also read about this today.

If you have been to the Yarra Valley or the Mornington Peninsula, or many other regions in Victoria, you will have seen many, many, grape vines so this will help your understanding of what Jesus said. Just like the vine needs a trellis or wires, we also need support systems that work for us so that we are being shaped and supported while undertaking the bearing of fruit which is ours to do. Jesus not only calls us to be branches connected to him, the vine, he also enables and supports us in doing so.

As Branches, our place is to belong to the vine so intimately that we become one with the Vine where we experience such words as – abide, rest in, be present to, be nurtured by, and draw life from; the vine - Jesus.

Branches draw their life from the vine. As branches, we must attend to the ways God gives us life – we often miss what God gives because we are too busy or too blind. So this doesn't happen, we must regularly, prayerfully, re-visit and reflect on events to identify times and experiences of grace when God was at work and to see how we can better co-operate with God's work. Such may go un-noticed at the time but may be noticed when we look back and reflect. Reflecting in this way brings life and growth and leads to an even more fruitful life. I'm sure you all know the poem 'Footprints', where in looking back the poet discovers that at times, even though unaware of it, God was actually carrying him, or her. We are carried by the vine.

Finally, in thinking of the Vine and Branches, we can read a little later in John 15, verse 16, that Jesus said: “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.” This is imagery about growth: growth of individuals, and growth of the Kingdom of God. This growth is God’s work in which we are invited to have a share. Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. We stay healthy only as we are connected to him. Such health, affects not only us, but also those with whom we serve and will also be a key element in people deciding whether or not they accept what we proclaim as the Good News: of living in Christ and letting Christ live in us, as branches living in the vine, living fruitful lives, living with and for the sake of *one another*.

P.S. I mentioned the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem I saw recently. I thought you might enjoy seeing a photo and feel encouraged about the meeting between St Philip and the Ethiopian, about which we read on Sunday. Perhaps the Christians photographed are in some way a result of that meeting.

