

Sunday, May 2, 2021  
Fifth Sunday of Easter  
Reflections by Juel Pierce

## 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.*

<sup>26</sup>An 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.) <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."

<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.

### **Reflection**

*Who sent Philip on the “wilderness road”? (verse 26) Who did he meet there? (verse 27) Notes in the Lutheran Bible state that it was common in those times for officials in royal courts to be physically altered so they could not father children. What did this particular man do? Why had he come to Jerusalem? What was he reading in his chariot? (verse 28) Why and how did Philip introduce himself? (verses 29-30) Did the man welcome him? (verse 31) How did Philip know he was interested in knowing more about Jesus? (verses 32-34) How did Philip respond to the man’s questions? (verse 35) What did the man want Philip to do for him? (verse 36) What happened then? (verse 38) Then where did both the eunuch and Philip go? (verse 39) What did Philip do then? (verse 40) Have you ever visited with someone who wanted to know more about your faith in Jesus? What would you do?*

### **Psalm 22:25-31**

*All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD. (Ps. 22:27)*

<sup>25</sup>From you comes my praise in the | great assembly;  
I will perform my vows in the sight of those who | fear the  
LORD.

<sup>26</sup>**The poor shall eat | and be satisfied,  
Let those who seek the LORD give praise! May your hearts |  
live forever!**

<sup>27</sup>All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn | to the  
LORD;  
all the families of nations shall bow | before God.

<sup>28</sup>**For dominion belongs | to the LORD,  
who rules o- | ver the nations.**

<sup>29</sup>Indeed, all who sleep in the earth shall bow | down in  
worship;  
all who go down to the dust, though they be dead, shall kneel  
be- | fore the LORD.

<sup>30</sup>**Their descendants shall | serve the LORD,  
whom they shall proclaim to genera- | tions to come.**

<sup>31</sup>They shall proclaim God's deliverance to a people | yet  
unborn,  
saying to them, "The | LORD has acted!"

## **Reflection**

*We read this psalm not long ago, during Lent, and then we heard it during Holy Week. How does when we read it influence how we hear it? Is after Easter a different context than during Lent or Holy Week? What does the psalmist vow? (verse 25) What does the psalmist encourage those who worship together to respond? (verse 26) What about "all the families of the nations"? Is this only Jews (this is part of their hymns) or Christians? (verses 27-28) Who all is going to worship God? (verses 29-30) Why does everyone in this psalm worship God? (verse 31) How has God acted in our time?*

## 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.*

<sup>7</sup>Beloved, 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 Savior 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 judgment, 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.

## **Reflection**

*Why are we to love one another? (verse 7) Where does love come from? What about those who do not love? (verse 8) Can we know God and not love others? How do we know about, and not only about, but know God's love? (verse 9) Can we initiate love for God? (verse 10) What happens to us as a result of God's love for us? (verse 11) How does loving one another let us know God? (verse 12) Who gives us God's love? (verse 13) What does the Spirit empower us to testify? (verse 14) Who does God abide in? (verse 15) What does it mean to "abide in God"? What do we know when we abide in God? (verse 16) What happens when "Love [is] perfected in us? (verse 17) Can those who abide in love be afraid? (verse 18) Who is afraid? Why do we love? (verse 19) Is it possible to love and hate those who abide in God with us (that is, our sisters and brothers? (verse 20) One of the truisms that we sometimes hear is that you can't command love. What does John the letter writer think of that? (verse 21) What is love? We sometimes think of love is how we feel about someone. And sometimes it is—I love my husband and feel tender about him and loved by him. I don't "love" everyone that way. Who is it hard for you to love? (I have my own list.) What does it mean to love them?*

## **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 said:] <sup>1</sup>"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.  
<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.”

## **Reflection**

*In this text Jesus uses the metaphor of a vine to illustrate and speak about the relationship of his followers to him and to God. In this metaphor, who is God the Father? Who is Jesus? (verse 1) Why does the gardener remove some branches? (verse 2) What is the difference between a branch being removed and being pruned? Note that footnotes in the NRSV say that the same Greek root word (the language in which the NT was written) means both “to cleanse” and “to prune.” So Jesus says that we have already been pruned by his word. (verse 3) What is the only way we can bear fruit, as branches? (verses 4-5) If you’ve ever had a houseplant that has lost a branch, or a garden plant that has suckers removed, you know this. What happens to such branches? (verse 6) What happens when we abide in Jesus and Jesus’ words abide in us? (verse 7) If we abide in Jesus, and his words abide in us, what will we ask for? How is God glorified by us? (verse 8) How does this text help you understand and live as disciples of Jesus?*