



The Fifth Sunday of Easter 28th April 2024

Grace, mercy and peace
from God our Father
and the Lord Jesus Christ
be with you.

HYMN

Come, ye faithful, raise the anthem,
cleave the skies with shouts of praise;
sing to him who found the ransom,
Ancient of eternal days,
God of God, the Word incarnate,
whom the heaven of heaven obeys

Ere he raised the lofty mountains,
formed of the seas, or built the sky,
love eternal, free and boundless,
moved the Lord of life to die,
foreordained the Prince of princes
for the throne of Calvary.

There, for us and our redemption,
see him for all his lifeblood pour,
there he wins our full salvation,
dies that we may die no more;
then, arising, lives for ever,
reigning where he was before.

Bring your harps, and bring your incense,
sweep the string and pour the lay;
let the earth proclaim his wonders,
King of that celestial day;
he the lamb once slain is worthy,
who was dead, and lives for ay.

Christ died to sin once for all, and now he lives to God.
Let us renew our resolve to have done with all that is evil
and confess our sins in penitence and faith.

Like Mary at the empty tomb,
we fail to grasp the wonder of your presence.
Lord, have mercy.
Lord, have mercy.

High on yon celestial mountains
stands his gem-built throne, all bright,
midst unending alleluias
bursting from the sons of light;
Zion's people tell his praises,
Victor after hard-won fight.

Yet this earth he still remembers,
still by him the flock are fed;
yea, he gives them food immortal,
gives himself, the living Bread;
leads them where the precious fountain
from the smitten rock is shed.

Trust him then, ye fainting pilgrims;
who shall pluck you from his hand?
Pledged he stands for your salvation,
pledged to give the promised land,
where among the ransomed nations
ye around his throne shall stand.

Laud and honour to the Father,
laud and honour to the Son,
laud and honour to the Spirit,
ever Three and ever One,
consubstantial, co-eternal,
while unending ages run.

Like the disciples behind locked doors,
we are afraid to be seen as your followers.
Christ, have mercy.

Christ, have mercy.

Like Thomas in the upper room,
we are slow to believe.

Lord, have mercy.

Lord, have mercy.

Absolution

May the Lord absolve us from our offences, +
And raise us to new life
for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Saviour. **Amen.**

The Collect

Almighty God,
who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ
have overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life:
grant that, as by your grace going before us
 you put into our minds good desires,
so by your continual help
we may bring them to good effect;
through Jesus Christ our risen Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.
Amen

A reading from the New Testament
Acts 8 26 - end

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. ³¹ "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth."

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" ^[37] ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up

out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Psalm 22. 25-end



²⁵ From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
before those who fear you I will fulfil my vows.

²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the LORD will praise him—
may your hearts live forever!

²⁷ All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,

²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD
and he rules over the nations.

²⁹ All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.

³⁰ Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.

³¹ They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

New Testament Reading
1 John 4. 7-end

God's Love and Ours

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶ And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. ¹⁷ This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom

they have not seen. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

HYMN

Jesus lives! thy terrors now
can no longer, death, appal us;
Jesus lives! by this we know
thou, O grave, canst not enthrall us.
Alleluia!

Jesus lives! for us he died;
then, alone to Jesus living,
pure in heart may we abide,
glory to our Saviour giving.
Alleluia!

Jesus lives! henceforth is death
but the gate of life immortal;
this shall calm our trembling breath
when we pass its gloomy portal.
Alleluia!

Jesus lives! our hearts know well
nought from us his love shall sever;
life, nor death, nor powers of hell
tear us from his keeping ever.
Alleluia!

Jesus lives! to him the throne
over all the world is given:
may we go where he has gone,
rest and reign with him in heaven.
Alleluia!

The Gospel

Alleluia, alleluia.

Jesus said, 'All who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day.'

Alleluia

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to John (John 15 1-8)

All Glory be to thee O Lord

The Vine and the Branches

15 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵ "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

This is the gospel of the Lord

Praise to you O Christ

“Do you understand what you are reading?” He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?”

There were many people at the time of the early church who were looking for a truer faith, a deeper experience of God. They were wearied with the many gods of other nations and the loose moral standards. They were drawn to the one God and austere moral standards of Judaism in which they found meaning. Many converted undergoing the rite of circumcision others just attended Jewish synagogues and read the scriptures and were called ‘God-fearers’. There was a reserved outer court in the Temple, ‘the court of the gentiles’ where they could come and worship, the same court where Jesus cleared out the money changers and traders.

It is likely that the Ethiopian official was one such as this for he was returning from worshipping at Jerusalem and he had a copy of the Jewish scriptures. The meeting with Philip, is couched in the language of the ‘spirit leading’, but we could also say that Philip simply felt led or prompted to go to this place even though he did not know why. We have met Philip before when he told his friend Nathanael about Jesus and invited him to “...come and see”. Philip is an evangelist, a bringer of good news.

Philip soon realises why he felt led to be there when he saw and heard this man reading from one of the Jewish scrolls. People usually read out loud rather than as we do now, particularly sacred texts. The point to note was Philip’s readiness and sensitivity to the prompting of the Spirit and his readiness to act when he saw the opportunity.

I think this can happen to us, you may have experienced it. We feel a prompt to say something or do something. If we follow it up, it just may be God and if not and just a thought of our own, nothing is lost and anyway – who knows! We are just called to be obedient and faithful, ‘full-of-faith’, that God has a purpose.

We will not meet someone reading from a scroll in a chariot, but the questions to which the Ethiopian was seeking answers, are the same – what does this mean? Humans try to make sense of the world, of their lives, it is how we seek to survive. Many of the questions people ask, in fact all the questions, ultimately find their source in our need for meaning, purpose, relationships, and how to understand what is happening to us.

It all seems easy and neat for Philip. A quick Bible lesson which brings clarity to the man and is met with his belief and his desire to make a commitment through Baptism.

I witnessed that once. Carol, a friend from school rang out of the blue after years and the first thing she said was “Do you still go to church?” I did not know she even knew I did. She asked me to visit that day which I did feeling totally inadequate and unprepared wishing I had referred her to a local vicar(!). She questioned me about Jesus and ‘signed up’ on the spot – no one was more surprised than me. She was baptised in a friend’s swimming pool a few weeks later.

I do not believe my stumbling words ‘did it’, but the meeting was a catalyst – a moment for her to release faith and receive Christ. I think she just needed to meet someone who believed what she was coming to believe. Just as Philip was there for the Ethiopian, and a preacher named John many years ago, was for me. But the Holy Spirit had been present in her life drawing her to this point for a long time. They are all dead now, but I always think of Carol when I read this account.

“Faith comes by hearing and hearing the word of God.” Paul writes.

It seems extraordinary that in God's purposes the saving work of Christ should be committed to the slender thread of preaching and hearing or reading the word. Jesus says as much in the gospel today. *You have already been cleansed by **the word** that I have **spoken** to you.* The words spoken.

Jesus then tells his friends that they are to 'abide' in him. Abide has the idea of settling down and staying put. To 'abide' in Jesus means a consciousness of his life in relation to ours. We become aware of the life and teaching Jesus affecting our life. Jesus uses the image of a branch on a vine. We receive life from the root stock of the vine (Jesus) and receive his strength and all the benefits of his life.

This can just sound like encouraging words, but it also works in practice. Whenever you are overwhelmed by the negatives of life whether from outside or within, stop take a breath. Like a branch, you are just experiencing a frosty blast, or a scorching heat, or perhaps a passing insect or animal has nibbled or taken out a chunk. You will recover, this too will pass! Picture the life of Christ 'flowing into you' just like a stem takes up water and nutrients.

Our having 'faith' is not just words or rather vague. What God wants for us is a life vitally united with his son Jesus who is the expression of the Father's life. Faith is not a word, it is action. Jesus sets before us a truth; stay united to me and you will be fruitful, for that is God our Father's will for our lives. This truth is set before us. What we do with it is 'our move'.

Philip and the Ethiopian go their separate ways, both rejoicing and both to continue to spread the word of Jesus. Tradition has it that this man spread the word in Ethiopia and Philip finds himself in Azotus where he 'continues to proclaim the good news.

Intercessions

That our risen Saviour may fill us and the church throughout the world with the joy of his glorious and life-giving resurrection ...

That isolated and persecuted churches
 may find fresh strength in the good news of Easter ...
we pray to the Father.
.... In your mercy hear us.

That God may grant us humility
to be subject to one another in Christian love ...
we pray to the Father.
.... In your mercy hear us.

That he may provide for those who lack food, work or shelter ...
we pray to the Father
.... In your mercy hear us.

That by his power war and famine may cease through all the world ...
we pray to the Father.
.... In your mercy hear us.

That he may reveal the light of his presence to the sick,
 the weak and the dying,
to comfort and strengthen them ...
we pray to the Father.
.... In your mercy hear us.

That, according to his promises,
all who have died in the faith of the resurrection
may be raised on the last day ...
we pray to the Father.
.... In your mercy hear us.

That he may send the fire of the Holy Spirit upon his people,
so that we may bear faithful witness to his resurrection,
we pray to the Father.
.... In your mercy hear us.

Heavenly Father,
you have delivered us from the power of darkness
and brought us into the kingdom of your Son:
grant that, as his death has recalled us to life,
so his continual presence in us may raise us to eternal joy;
through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

As our Saviour taught us, we are bold to say:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours now and for ever.

Amen.

Jesus Christ,
keep the Church in the unity of the Spirit
and in the bond of peace,
and bring the whole created order to worship at your feet;
for you are alive and reign with the Father
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Amen.

The Blessing

The God of peace,
who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus,
that great shepherd of the sheep,
through the blood of the eternal covenant,
make you perfect in every good work to do his will,
working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit
be with you now and always. **Amen**

HYMN

1 Judge Eternal, throned in splendour,
Lord of lords and King of kings,
with your living fire of judgment
purge this land of bitter things;
solace all its wide dominion
with the healing of your wings.

2 Still the weary folk are pining
for the hour that brings release,
and the city's crowded clangour
cries aloud for sin to cease,
and the homesteads and the woodlands
plead in silence for their peace.

3 Crown, O God, your own endeavour;
cleave our darkness with your sword;
feed the faithless and the hungry
with the richness of your word;
cleanse the body of this nation
through the glory of the Lord.