

SUNDAY 2nd May: 5th Sunday of Easter

Led by the Rev'd Alison Myers, Team Rector of the Lordsbridge Team

Opening words

Rising from death, today Christ greets his people.

Rising with all creation, we greet you as our King.

Hymn

To God be the glory,
great things he hath done
so loved he the world
that he gave us his son,
who yielded his life
an atonement for sin
and opened the life gate
that all may go in.

*Praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord,
let the earth hear his
voice
Praise the Lord! Praise
the Lord,
Let the people rejoice!
O come to the Father
through Jesus the Son
and give him the glory
great things he hath
done.*

O perfect redemption,
the purchase of blood!
to every believer the
promise
of God;
the vilest offender
who truly believes,
that moment from Jesus
a pardon receives.

Great things he hath taught
us,
great things he hath done,
and great our rejoicing
through Jesus the Son,
but purer and higher
and greater will be
our wonder, our worship
when Jesus we see!

Meditation 'Making yourself at home with God'

What does it mean to you to 'be at home with God'?

"I am the vine, you are the branches ... if you make yourselves at home with me and my words are at home in you, you can be sure that whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon." (John 15:5,7; The Message)

"Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you." (John 15:4; The Message)

"I've loved you the way my Father has loved me. Make yourselves at home in my love. If you keep my commands, you'll remain intimately at home in my love." (John 15:9; The Message)

Imagine yourself 'at home' having a conversation with God. Tell him about all the things that are on your mind - all the things that may be stopping you relaxing in his presence and concentrating on what he wants you to hear.

Lord, I pray that you will empower us to throw off anything that is holding us back from being at home in your loving presence and praising you. Amen.

Confession

Christ Jesus, in the light of your risen presence, and in union with your frail apostles, we say sorry
For not weighing your words,
Lord have mercy
Lord have mercy.

For not sharing your trials,
Christ have mercy
Christ have mercy.

For not believing your promises,
Lord have mercy.
Lord have mercy.

Hymn

There is a hope that burns within my heart,
That gives me strength for every passing day;
A glimpse of glory now revealed in meagre part,
Yet drives all doubt away:
I stand in Christ, with sins forgiven;
And Christ in me, the hope of heaven!
My highest calling and my deepest joy,
To make His will my home.

There is a hope that lifts my weary head,
A consolation strong against despair,
That when the world has plunged me in its deepest pit,
I find the Saviour there!
Through present sufferings, future's fear,
He whispers 'courage' in my ear.
For I am safe in everlasting arms,
And they will lead me home.

There is a hope that stands the test of time,
That lifts my eyes beyond the beckoning grave,
To see the matchless beauty of a day divine
When I behold His face!
When sufferings cease and sorrows die,
And every longing satisfied.
Then joy unspeakable will flood my soul,
For I am truly home.

The collect

**Risen Christ,
your wounds declare your love for the world
and the wonder of your risen life:
give us compassion and courage
to risk ourselves for those we serve,
to the glory of God the Father. Amen**

Readings'

Read by Fiona Whelan

Reading I – Acts 8.26-end

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go towards the south^[g] 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?'^[h] He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip^[i] 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.

Reading 2 – John 15.1-8

Introduced with the words...

Jesus says:

I am the resurrection and the life.

You break the power of sin and death.

I am the bread of life.

You feed and fill the hungry.

I am the true vine.

You bring us life eternal.

'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^[a] to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed^[b] 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^[c] my disciples.

Reflection

By Sue Nelms

How can I unless someone guides me?

Do you ever find yourself taking an instant liking or dislike to someone? I have to confess that I think that I really rather like Philip in today's reading from Acts. He is a bit of a super-hero, doing amazing things yet coming across somehow as being humble, doing exactly what he needs to do without a fuss. He is also one of the few people in the Bible who suddenly makes a pretty inexplicable exit which is apparently nothing out of the ordinary for the people around him.

The Philip in today's reading is Philip the Evangelist, not Philip the apostle. He is part of the early Church and becomes one of what was known as the seven, a group of men chosen by the apostles to serve the community's physical needs so that the apostles themselves could focus on prayer and serving the word.

The overwhelming impression we get of Philip is obedience; whatever he is told to do, he does wholeheartedly, so when an angel tells him to go to the wilderness road that runs south from Jerusalem to Gaza, he goes. Now at the time there was more than one road between Jerusalem and Gaza and the others were in better condition than the one that went through the desert so they had the bulk of the traffic, but Philip does not question the angel. He simply waits for guidance as to what to do next.

He sees an Ethiopian Eunuch, the government official in charge of the treasury of the queen of the Ethiopians so a really important man, travelling home along the south road in his carriage after visiting Jerusalem.

He was not from the Ethiopia that we would think of today. At that time, Ethiopia was made up of what we would think of as a mixture of southern Egypt and northern Sudan, rather than being where Ethiopia is today. It was also known as Kush – and if you remember the wife of

Moses came from Kush, so the two nations were familiar to each other.

Although he was called Ethiopian, the official is possibly a Jewish believer because he had been to Jerusalem, the place where Jews were supposed to worship God, in order to visit the temple and worship. It is not clear just how far he would have been allowed to go in the temple because his physical condition would have made him unclean under the law according to Deuteronomy chapter 23 verse 1 and therefore unable to enter any of the areas considered holy than the general areas. On the other hand in Isaiah chapter 56, God welcomes both foreigners and eunuchs.

Whatever reception he had received, as he returns home in his chariot, he is reading chapter 53 of Isaiah, about the sacrificial lamb, but struggling to understand it. Was it referring to the prophet himself, Isaiah, or could it have been referring to the man Jesus, who had recently been crucified in Jerusalem, about whom there were reports that he had risen from the dead and proved his place as Messiah?

At this moment you get one of the bizarre super-hero images from this story; that of Philip running alongside the carriage calmly chatting to the official and asking him if he understands what he is reading and then being invited to join him and explain it to him.

It turns out that the Eunuch is also a man of action. Once Philip had explained things to him he understood and became a Christian believer. And having accepted Philip's authority, on seeing some water he asks Philip to baptize him. His choice of words "What is to prevent me from being baptized?" may answer the question we had before about how much access the official got to the Temple in Jerusalem – did something or someone there prevent him from worshipping his God properly?

After the baptism you get the second of this story's bizarre super-hero images; that of Philip being transported to somewhere completely different, Azotus, some 30 miles away, while the Eunuch goes on his way rejoicing, apparently oblivious to Philip's absence or accepting of it. Philip, on the other hand, having landed, and presumably gathered his breath in Azotus, then starts doing what he does best, sharing the word of God with everyone. Philip's input into the story more or less

ends at this point, although we do learn later that he makes his way slowly up the coast to Caesarea, talking to people all of the way, settles there and has four daughters who apparently continue his work of evangelisation. The final reference to him in the book is in chapter 21 when he and his family are visited by Paul and his followers.

Back tracking for a moment, the Ethiopian official's response to Philip's question "Do you understand what you are reading?" was "How can I unless someone guides me?" and that leads us into today's gospel reading looking at Jesus as the true vine, and God as the gardener.

A vine needs guiding, just as believers do. I don't know if you have ever grown a vine, but they need a lot of work in order to be productive. If you don't put in the work, they go wild and rampage all over the place, serving no real purpose and generally being a nuisance. We can be a bit like that. We need people to teach and explain the gospel to us. We need the Holy Spirit to help us to teach and explain the gospel to other people. If you look back at Philip's story, he responded when the Holy Spirit told him to go over to the chariot and join the Ethiopian official in his study of the book of Isaiah.

Again, after he had baptised the Ethiopian official, the Holy Spirit took Philip from the water and placed him in Azotus, a town on the coast some 30 miles away, where he began speaking to the people there.

Philip accepts and is comfortable with the Holy Spirit in his life.

Philip has faith in God. He puts his life into God's hands, is obedient to God's command and bears fruit. By doing this, he glorifies God and I can really imagine God taking joy in Philip and the way he lives his life.

This is the challenge for us.

Are we prepared to abide in God because apart from him we can do nothing and end up withering?

Are we prepared to abide in him, accept his pruning, training and nurturing, bearing fruit as a result?

I pray this morning that we will abide in Him and that we will each be able to become like Philip, connecting with the people we meet, wherever we meet them and answering that question "How can I unless someone guides me?". Amen

Affirmation of faith

**Christ died for our sins
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he was buried;
he was raised to life on the third day
in accordance with the Scriptures;
afterwards he appeared to his followers,
and to all the apostles:
this we have received, and this we believe. Amen.**

Cf 1 Cor 15:3-7

Intercessions

Led on Zoom by K.

If using this on your own then take some time to pray for our community, our church and our world in need.

We say the Lord's Prayer together...

**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 forever. Amen.**

Hymn

○ Jesus, I have promised
to serv thee to the end;
be thou for ever near me,
my Master and my Friend:
I shall not fear the battle
if thou art by my side,
nor wander from the pathway
if thou wilt be my guide.

○ let me hear thee speaking
in accents clear and still,
above the storms of passion,
the murmurs of self-will;
○ speak to reassure me,
to hasten or control;
○ speak, and make me listen,
thou guardian of my soul.

○ Jesus, thou hast promised
to all who follow thee,
that where thou art in glory
there shall thy servant be;
and, Jesus, I have promised
to serve thee to the end:
○ give me grace to follow,
my Master and my Friend.

○ let me see thy foot-marks,
and in them plant mine own;
my hope to follow duly
is in thy strength alone:
○ guide me, call me, draw me,
uphold me to the end;
and then in heaven receive me,
my Saviour and my Friend.

John Ernest Bode (1816-1874)

Final Blessing

God of life go with us
The Risen Christ beside us.
The vibrant Spirit within us.

And may the blessing...

Go in the peace of Christ. Alleluia. Alleluia.
Thanks be to God. Alleluia. Alleluia.