

Our Sunday Service Together

April 28th 2024

Easter 5

An Easter Acclamation

Praise be to God in the highest. It is our duty and our joy, always and everywhere to give you thanks, almighty and eternal Father, and especially in these days of Easter to celebrate with joyful hearts the memory of your wonderful works.

For by the mystery of his passion Jesus Christ, your risen Son, has conquered the powers of death and hell and restored in men and women the image of your glory. He has placed them once more in paradise and opened to them the gate of life eternal.

And so earth and heaven resound with gladness, while angels and archangels and the powers of all creation sing for ever the hymn of your glory.

Preparation

All: This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.
Through the brokenness of Christ, we become one body
as one body we now gather in the name of Christ to offer our praise and thanksgiving, to receive God's holy word, to pray for the needs of the world, and to seek the forgiveness of our sins,
that by the power of the Holy Spirit we may give ourselves to the service of God.

Our Confession

Let us come to the light of Christ, confessing our sins in penitence and faith.

All: Jesus Christ, risen Master and triumphant Lord, we come to you in sorrow for our sins, and confess to you our weakness and unbelief.

We have lived by our own strength, and not by the power of your resurrection.
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

We have lived by the light of our own eyes, as faithless and not believing.
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

We have lived for this world alone, and doubted our home in heaven.
In your mercy, forgive us, hear us and help us.

Be still for a moment in confession and in receiving God's Grace in Christ

All: May Almighty God, who in Jesus Christ has given us a kingdom that cannot be destroyed, forgive us our sins, open our eyes to God's truth, strengthen us to do God's will and give us the joy of his kingdom, through Jesus Christ our Risen Lord. **Amen.**

The opening prayer

All: The night has passed, and the day lies open before us; let us pray with one heart and mind.

Silence is kept.

All: As we rejoice in the gift of this new day, so may the light of your presence, O God, set our hearts on fire with love for you; now and for ever. Amen.

The Psalmody Psalm 22.25 -31

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
I will perform my vows in the presence of those that fear you.
The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek the Lord shall praise him; their hearts shall live for ever.
All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.
For the kingdom is the Lord's and he rules over the nations.
How can those who sleep in the earth bow down in worship,
or those who go down to the dust kneel before him?
He has saved my life for himself; my descendants shall serve him;
this shall be told of the Lord for generations to come.
They shall come and make known his salvation, to a people yet unborn,
declaring that he, the Lord, has done it.
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen

Scripture Reading Acts 8.26-40

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.)²⁷ 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 worship²⁸ and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it.'³⁰ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?'³¹ He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.³² 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.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth.'

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, 'About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?'³⁵ Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.³⁶ 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?'³⁸ He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, 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 snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.⁴⁰ 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.

At the end of the reading we say:

All: This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Gloria

All: Glory to God in the highest, and peace to his people on earth.
Lord God, heavenly King, almighty God and Father, we worship you, we give you thanks, we praise you for your glory.
Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the Father, Lord God, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world: have mercy on us; you are seated at the right hand of the Father: receive our prayer.
For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

The Gospel John 15.1-8

¹I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide 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. ⁵I 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. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

at the end of the reading we say:

All: This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

A Reflection for the day

Philip, one of the seven elected 'deacons' emerges for us as the first "evangelist" to preach the gospel outside Jerusalem and Judea. He begins this work in next door Samaria, occupied by people with a history of ethnic-religious conflict with Jerusalem-oriented Jews. Philip enjoys great success as a large number of urban Samaritans believe his message and are baptized in Christ's name.

But then, this very strange day occurs. Philip finds himself suddenly dispatched south, in the midday sun to the "wilderness/desert road" running from Jerusalem to Gaza. A desert, in the noon day sun, in a land filled with folks who despised the Jerusalem Jews was not the sort of place anyone would have expected to be and therefore no work of God to be possible.

However, there is someone there, racing along in his chariot – Philip has to run up to it and keep with it. In the chariot is the chief treasury officer to the queen of the Ethiopians; thus the fancy chariot. But what is he doing on this Jerusalem-Gaza road? He's heading home to Ethiopia, but not from a diplomatic mission. Rather, he had visited Jerusalem on a religious pilgrimage to worship Israel's God. He had also procured a scroll of Isaiah, a valuable document not widely available, which he happens to be reading when Philip approaches. But this man is a eunuch, which actually makes him a no-man to the world about him. Though enjoying advantages in his high economic and political status, his eunuch condition marks him as deviant in "normal" society, and though he seeks God in Jerusalem the religious folks there would have rejected him. His journey had been a waste of time – or has it?

Philip hears the eunuch reading Isaiah aloud and recognised someone seeking the things of God. So he asks a telling question, asks him, "Do you fully understand what you are looking for in reading this writing?" This is not any random Isaiah text, it's an evocative passage about a shorn, scorned, shamed sheep-like figure

to whom “justice” and “offspring” were denied. You might wonder if, as a further rejection of this “non-man”, the folks in Jerusalem had sold him the scroll. If the Eunuch had not got the message whilst in Jerusalem he should get it now, his emasculated, mutilated body, his inability to ever have children, meant he was for ever ‘cut off’ from the life of God’s people, the ‘vine’.

The eunuch understandably asks, ‘About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’ Is this passage about a figure from history or is it applicable to me, today? But, there is hope, there is light, and Philip shines that light.

We do not have the text of the conversation about Jesus, God’s Son, who suffered in sympathetic solidarity with all victims of violence and stigmatization, like Isaiah’s slaughtered lamb—and the Ethiopian eunuch. In his resurrection by God, the household of God is opened to all faithful sufferers—including eunuchs, foreigners, and other “outcasts”—just as Isaiah announced a little later in his scroll!

Where the Jerusalem faithful had sought to make God exclusive, Jesus reveals instead that God is radically inclusive. In seeking to keep the fruit of the vine pure the workers of the vineyard had made it barren and fruitless. The true wine is made from a variety of fruits grafted to the true vine; the bruised, the marginalised, the misshaped, the off colour – the foreigners, outcasts, the emasculated, the mutilated – and the Ethiopian eunuch readily grasps the point.

And he moves to act: “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” - nothing! With barriers blocking fellowships broken down, nothing “prevents” Philip and the eunuch entering the baptismal waters together and emerging as full brothers in Christ in God’s family.

Here is ‘good news’ for all; God loves the entire cosmos and sent Jesus to enable fellowship and the embracing of all; especially the rejected and marginalised! Here is what His church is to reflect, here is what His church is to move an act on. If God in Christ is completely inclusive, then so we are called to be!

The Creed

All: I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again; he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.
Amen.

Prayers *We make our intercessions*

In the power of the Spirit and in union with Christ let us pray to the Father.

Lord, as you call us to walk in your ways, guide us that we may do what you would have us do, that we, your church, may do greater things for the Father’s glory.

Lord, lead us in the way of your peace, guide us in your path of life.

We pray for those in positions of authority, for all making difficult decisions this week for justice, peace and the marginalized in society. May we see the way to both prosper and live as human beings and to guard and bless the ecology of the world.

Lord, lead us in the way of your peace, guide us in your path of life.

We give you thanks for those who have enriched our lives, built and sustained our communities, those who give vision of a good future and a safe path on which to journey. We pray for our families and friends, for homes, hospitals, and all therein.

Lord, lead us in the way of your peace, guide us in your path of life.

We pray at this time for all who are confused about the truth, or about life, those known to us whose minds are disturbed, those who have lost their way. We pray for those who have no peace, and for those unwell in body, mind or spirit, especially

Lord, lead us in the way of your peace, guide us in your path of life.

Lord Christ, you have gone before us and prepared a place for us, lead us until we come fully into your kingdom and walk before you in that life which is eternal.

Lord, lead us in the way of your peace, guide us in your path of life.

Open our ears O Lord to hear your word and know your voice. Speak to our hearts and strengthen our wills that we may serve you today and always. Amen.

The Collect

All: 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.**

Gathering our prayers and praises into one, let us pray with confidence as our Saviour has taught us

All: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
for ever and ever. Amen.

The Conclusion

All: Christ, as a light illumine and guide me this day.
Christ, as a shield overshadow me.
Christ under me, Christ over me; Christ beside me on my left and my right.
This day be within and without me. Amen.