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| **The Lessons Appointed for Use on the** | http://www.lectionarypage.net/Art/Newshield.gif |
| Fifth Sunday of Easter |
| Year B RCL |

Acts 8:26-40

1 John 4:7-21

John 15:1-8

Psalm 22:24-30

**The Collect**

Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.*Amen.*

**The First Lesson**

**Acts 8:26-40**

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.) 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.

**The Response**

**Psalm 22:24-30**

***Deus, Deus meus***

24 My praise is of him in the great assembly; \*  
I will perform my vows in the presence of those who worship him.

25 The poor shall eat and be satisfied,  
and those who seek the Lord shall praise him: \*  
"May your heart live for ever!"

26 All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord, \*  
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.

27 For kingship belongs to the Lord; \*  
he rules over the nations.

28 To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship; \*  
all who go down to the dust fall before him.

29 My soul shall live for him;  
my descendants shall serve him; \*  
they shall be known as the Lord'S for ever.

30 They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn \*  
the saving deeds that he has done.

**The Epistle**

**1 John 4:7-21**

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 Savior 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 judgment, 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.

**The Gospel**

**John 15:1-8**

Jesus said to his disciples, ”I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. 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.”

Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life.*Amen.*

Many of you may have seen this video of the Pope (Papa) interacting with this small Italian boy. I’m not sure how this boy got picked, the pre-screening process was truly the work of the Spirit, because this little boy went up to the Pope to ask his question. And he couldn’t quite get the question out, he is young, maybe 6-7. “I can’t, I can’t” he’s saying in Italian. After some encouragement and cajoling, the Pope beckons him to come up to him. He cries with the Pope hugging him. They exchange a private conversation. The Pope comforts the boy and he goes back to his seat. The little boy shared with the Pope his concern; he conveyed with his heavy heart that his father had died and the boy was worried that because his father was not a believer that he was not in heaven. He also told the Pope that his father had had all his children baptized.

The Pope, as you may have guessed, assured the boy that his father was loved by God and was with God. The pope told him that it was much easier to baptize your children when you believe than when you don’t believe, that God would love the action that his father had chosen, and that God loved his father and his father was with God. I’m sure that the Pope, even the Pope, at that point upset someone in charge of Catholic doctrine.

I tell you this story not because I’m advocating any sort of unbelief, far from it. I tell you because it speaks volumes about what should be the understanding of Christians that God is love. This is central. The unbelieving father had his own struggels, one can be sure. How does he believe enough to baptize his children, and obviously have them in church or the boy would not know to ask the Pope his question, and yet still the father is not a believer himself? I don’t have an answer, but I know the struggle to be true.

Maybe the father was like the Ethiopian eunuch who struggled to understand and never had anyone to explain to him adequately?

The world, in bibilical times and now, is a harsh place in many, many ways. It is populated by humans, and we, as humans, overall don’t have such a good track record of being kind. We have the habit of going about how we want to. We have the habit of being like vines, growing every which way like wild grape vines. If we want to be less like wild grape vines, and want to grow and flourish in the manner or in the way the vinter (aka God) would have us grow— flourishing and producing good wine, then we are, all of us, in need pruning. We need pruning as individuals, we need pruning as communities, we need pruning as churches, as dioceses, as countries. We are connected to the gardener and cared for by gardener and conected by the vine, we are the branches and we are forever in need of pruning. What needs pruning? All the things that do not bring abundant life, everything that takes us away from abiding in God’s love.

Now the word “abide” is a funny one. It is not simply existing, it is breathing, moving, having our lifes, but having our lives in a manner that is pleasing to the gardener. It is breathing and living and flourishing. It is aligning our wills with God’s will. The corrollary of that is that when we do ask for something we receive it, we are provided, because we don’t ask for something not connected to God and Jesus, we ask rightly because we abide. For to abide is to love and to remain in God’s love. The basis for all such love is the love of God that is first, it is sufficient and it is complete. God loves us first and foremost. When we live in that love, recognizing our utter dependence on the garden and Jesus, then we abide. God loves us and therefore we should love one another.

To abide in Jesus is to love him and to know him to be the way, the truth, and the life. To abide is to have the abundant life promised by Jesus and to have it now.

The Pope knows this. I hope that little boy was helped to know this. The Ethiopian eunuch came to know this, and we know it; and like him, we go on our way rejoicing.