

The Fifth Sunday of Easter - Year B - 3rd May, 2015

This connection between resurrection and living a life of love and service to others continues this week in the Lectionary. The primary challenge is to be those who bear fruit for the sake of Christ, and the fruit we are called to bear is Christ-like, sacrificial love that creates a world in which God's righteousness and justice last for generations.

May our worship challenge and change us into true lovers of God and of people.

INTRODUCTIONS

For use by lectors, in order of service, parish bulletins and magazines

Acts 8 : 26-40

The church soon began to reach beyond Jerusalem. Before this event, Philip, a deacon, had made converts in Samaria. Now, by way of a roadside encounter with an Ethiopian official, he spreads the good news even further.

1 John 4 : 7-21

John, the great apostle of love, implores us to recognise how great is God's love shown in Jesus, and to live as those who are united by that love both to God and to one another.

John 15 : 1-8

In his letter John wrote of how we dwell in God and he in us. In this Gospel reading Jesus uses the metaphor of the vine to describe the way his life works in us, and how this bears fruit in loving action.

Click here to view the readings

http://bible.oremus.org/?show_adj=no&passages=Acts%208:%2026-40%0A%20BOR%0ADeuteronomy%204:%2032-40%0A%20Psalm%2022:%2025-31%0A1%20John%204:%207-21%0AJohn%2015:%201-8

COLLECTS OF THE DAY

Collect One

O Almighty God,
who alone canst order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men;
Grant unto thy people,
that they may love the thing which thou commandest,
and desire that which thou dost promise;
that so, among the sundry and manifold changes of the world,
our hearts may surely there be fixed,
where true joys are to be found;
through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Collect Two

Lord of all life and power,
who through the mighty resurrection of your Son
overcame the old order of sin and death
to make all things new in him:
Grant that we, being dead to sin
and alive to you in Jesus Christ,
may reign with him in glory;

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to whom with you and the Holy Spirit
be praise and honour, glory and might,
now and in all eternity.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 1

To bear fruit as a disciple is to receive life, show love, and tell the good news.
We pray, therefore, "Source of life, grant fruitfulness", and we respond, C:
Alleluia, Amen.

That the province/Church of....., may experience continued
growth in faith and love.
Source of life, grant fruitfulness.
Alleluia, Amen.

That all countries of the world may work together for understanding and peace.
Source of life, grant fruitfulness.
Alleluia, Amen.

That the senior members of our congregation may be honoured and enjoy
self-esteem as Christ's servants.
Source of life, grant fruitfulness.
Alleluia, Amen.

That the youthful members may find full inclusion in the ministry of our
congregation.
Source of life, grant fruitfulness.
Alleluia, Amen.

That the people of middle years in our congregation may experience increasing
worth and integrity in their service to Christ and his church.
Source of life, grant fruitfulness.
Alleluia, Amen.

That the children/ confirmation group / and those new to the faith may learn what it is to be
in Christ's service,
Source of life, grant fruitfulness.
Alleluia, Amen.

The shortfall of our concern in the church and world brings death in so many
ways, and contradicts the message of a risen Christ. Forgive us.
Source of life, grant fruitfulness.
Alleluia, Amen.

Speak more, O Saviour, that we might not live in a manner less than is worthy of
your name. C: Amen.

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE 2

Presider or deacon

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Christ has gathered us as branches of the true vine. Let us offer prayers to God who does for us whatever we ask.

Deacon or other leader

For the whole world and all the churches of God.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For this holy gathering and our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For *NN* and all the baptized whose faces shine with the light of Christ.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For all who minister and for all the holy people of God.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For all nations, peoples, tribes, clans, and families.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For all those in danger and need: the sick and the suffering, prisoners, captives, and their families, the hungry, homeless, and oppressed.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For the dying and the dead.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

For ourselves, our families, and those we love.

Glory and praise to you, O living God.

Remembering our parish's/patron/saint.....and all the saints, let us offer ourselves and one another to the living God through Christ. **To you, O Lord.**

Presider

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, who abides in all who love you. Hear the prayers we offer this day and give us your Spirit of peace to love our brothers and sisters; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

POST COMMUNION

Eternal God,
in word and sacrament
we proclaim your truth in Jesus Christ and share his life.
In his strength may we ever walk in his way,

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who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

PRAYERS

Mighty God,
in whom we know the power of redemption,
you stand among us in the shadows of our time.
As we move through every sorrow and trial of this life,
uphold us with knowledge of the final morning
when, in the glorious presence of your risen Son,
we will share in his resurrection,
redeemed and restored to the fullness of life
and forever freed to be your people. Amen.

Living God,
long ago, faithful women
proclaimed the good news
of Jesus' resurrection,
and the world was changed forever.
Teach us to keep faith with them,
that our witness may be as bold,
our love as deep,
and our faith as true. Amen.

Creator of the universe,
you made the world in beauty,
and restore all things in glory
through the victory of Jesus Christ.
We pray that, wherever your image is still disfigured
by poverty, sickness, selfishness, war and greed,
the new creation in Jesus Christ may appear in justice, love, and peace,
to the glory of your name. Amen.

O God, your Son remained with his disciples after his resurrection,
teaching them to love all people as neighbors.
As his disciples in this age,
we offer our prayers on behalf of the universe
in which we are privileged to live
and our neighbors with whom we share it....

Petitions... concluding with:

Open our hearts to your power moving
around us and between us and within us,
until your glory is revealed in our love of both friend and enemy,
in communities transformed by justice and compassion,
and in the healing of all that is broken. Amen.

Holy God,
you have called us to follow in the way of your risen Son,
and to care for those who are our companions,
not only with words of comfort, but with acts of love.

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Seeking to be true friends of all,
we offer our prayers on behalf of the church and the world.

Petitions... concluding with:

Guide us in the path of discipleship,
so that, as you have blessed us,
we may be a blessing for others,
bringing the promise of the kingdom near
by our words and deeds. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ,
God invites us to bring our doubts and fears,
our joys and concerns, our petitions and praise,
and offer them for the earth and all its creatures.

Petitions... concluding with: Receive these prayers, O God,
and transform us through them,
that we may have eyes to see and hearts to understand
not only what you do on our behalf,
but what you call us to do
so that your realm will come to fruition in glory. Amen.

God,
you sent your Son into the world
that we might live through him.
May we abide in his risen life
so that we may bear the fruit of love for one another
and know the fullness of joy. Amen.

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 forever and ever. Amen.

LECTIONARY NOTES 1

Acts 8:26-40:

- Rarely mentioned in the gospels, here disciple Philip gets a whole scene, as he explains a text from Isaiah (sheep to the slaughter) to a eunuch. Philip interprets the passage as speaking about Christ, and the scene ends with the eunuch's baptism, and Philip continuing preaching the good news.
- Philip leads here a mini-Bible study. Do you feel comfortable helping others understand scriptures? Who best helped you understand what you were reading in the Bible? How did they teach you?
- "how can I, unless someone guides me?" The eunuch has no problem letting someone help him. I have a harder time asking for help, submitting to teaching. I like to think I can do it on my own. When/how can you be open to someone guiding you in your spiritual life?

Psalm 22:25-31:

- We saw this Psalm in its entirety on [Good Friday](#), and in part with mostly this same selection [earlier in Lent](#). Today, our focus is *not* the "My God, my God, why have

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you forsaken me?" section we usually associate with this Psalm. *This* section is the conclusion of the Psalm - a much more hopeful section.

- Dominion belongs to God - not to us. God has (vs. 28) God may have given us a limited sense of dominion over creation - a dominion we've much abused, but really, this power belongs to God and not to us. Nevertheless, the world is quite filled with people and leaders who want to claim dominion.
- "The poor shall eat and be satisfied." What a day to look forward to. But think also metaphorically - how often do we fill ourselves and our lives with things that don't *really* satisfy us? Whenever we do, we are outside of God's plans and hopes for us.
- "deliverance to a people yet unborn" - God's promises are not just for us, but for those yet to come. We can help or hinder God's salvation getting to those yet to come.

1 John 4:7-21:

- A common wedding text, one that I personally prefer to 1 Corinthians 13. Our love, our basis and example for loving one another is God's love for us. How does God love you? How do you love others? In the same way? Is your love of others like God's love for you?
- "abide" - this word shows up in the epistle and in the gospel lesson for today. It is from the Greek *meno*[^], which means literally "to stay at home, to stay where one is, to not stir." It has the sense of "lasting" or "remaining." On a day when we also celebrate in the UMC "The Festival of the Christian Home," this is a perfect image. We are 'at home' in God's love, not wanting to stir from that place. And God is at home in us, if we let God.
- "that we may have boldness" - boldness because we are at home, trusting and resting in God's love. This knowledge gives us confidence, boldness to act.
- "liars" - John has this strong word for those who claim to love God but hate their neighbors. Illogical, John says, eloquently. "perfect love casts out fear." Nice. Perfect love.

John 15:1-8:

- I love this text, and always think of [the sermon Bishop Janice Riggle Huie](#) gave on this text at General Conference in 2000. I *highly* recommend reading it ("Hanging on for Dear Life." She said, in warning, that branches *don't cut off* other branches. Excellent.
- Again, abide - at home in God. (see notes above on meaning of 'abide.') Pruning and cutting down are different processes. We all need to be pruned. But in fear of being cut out altogether I think we resist God's pruning of us. But pruning produces even better fruit. How have you let God, or refused/resisted God's pruning of you?

By Beth Quick

LECTIONARY NOTES 2

REFLECTIONS ON THEME:

The heart of this week's Lectionary is Jesus' exhortation to "bear fruit". There are two emphases in this call. The first is to "remain in" Christ – dwelling in deep, life-giving connection with Christ. The experiences of Philip, who is guided by God's Spirit, and of the Eunuch who comes to faith through Philip's work are examples of this dwelling in Christ.

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The second emphasis is to "bear fruit". What this fruit might be is explained by the other passages (but also by the context of this one). John's letter explains that the test for our discipleship, and the "proof" of our love for God is our love for others. This agrees with the context of John 15 which also speaks about love as the commandment Jesus gives his disciples. The Acts reading and the Psalm also reflect another kind of fruit that we are called to bear – which certainly flows out of our love – it's the fruit of our witness to Christ. This section of Psalm 22, which is the restoration part of the Psalm of lament that Jesus quoted on the cross, speaks of proclaiming God's righteousness (justice) to unborn generations. This is an exhortation to share the goodness and justice of God with others in such a way that it impacts the world for those who are yet to be born. Philip's obedience to the Spirit, and gentle witness to the Ethiopian eunuch is an example of this fruit bearing – sharing God's grace and love with others (who would usually not be welcomed – as a Gentile and a eunuch this man would not have been permitted into the temple) in such a way that it changes the world for time to come – I believe some scholars have speculated that this eunuch could have founded the Ethiopian church that continues to this day. That's quite some fruit! Essentially, the key of this week's theme is that our love for God must flow out into love for others – both Christian companions and others – in such a way that they too come to love God and others. This growing cycle of love for God and neighbour is what it means to bear fruit for God's Reign.

CONNECTING WITH LIFE:

GLOBAL APPLICATION: On a global scale, I find this week's idea of a justice or righteousness that is proclaimed to unborn generations compelling. So often even our quest to love as Christ did is so immediate and short-sighted that we fail to recognise the long term impact of what we are allowing in our world, and sometimes, our work for justice now results in long term consequences that undermine or even negate the good we have created in the short term. One simple example is the situation in my home town of Cape Town in which citizens have been asked not to give money to beggars because of the long term, negative social impact this has – increased substance abuse, crime, dependencies on handouts, and the inability to become contributing members of society. In a similar way, a few years ago, using biofuels to address short term energy needs and climate change issues, resulted in great social challenges for third world countries as grain prices went up and food became increasingly scarce as crops were diverted to the more profitable biofuel industry. As we seek to respond to the call of this week's Lectionary to bear fruit, we need to acknowledge that true love does not seek the "quick fix" but is willing to commit to the long term, seeking true justice and attempting to bear fruit that lasts. This is a massive challenge in a world in which corporations are measured quarterly and Presidents have to prove themselves in 100 days. The addiction to immediate solutions and benefits is bringing suffering in so many ways – from human trafficking of children as cheap labour in the chocolate industry, to sweat shops in the clothing and technology industries, to the impact of fossil fuels on the environment, to the corruption that prevents aid reaching those who need it in some countries. But, the mark of our love as Christ-followers today will be seen in generations to come by whether our world is more just, equitable and sustainable because of our efforts to love well.

LOCAL APPLICATION: On a local and personal level, Philip's example is a good one for us to follow as we seek to love God and others, and bear fruit for Christ. A number of factors stand out in this "fruit-bearing" moment of Philip's. He was willing to be driven out of his way by his love for and obedience to God. He was willing to engage someone who was very different from him, and who would usually have been marginalised by his people. The eunuch was a foreigner, a gentile and a man who had been castrated and therefore, in one sense, unclean. He was also willing to meet the man where he was, beginning the

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conversation from the questions and reading of the eunuch. He did not impose his own agenda on the man, but listened and responded graciously and gently. Finally, he welcomed the eunuch into the community of faith by baptising him without question. All of these loving acts are the ones Jesus calls all his followers to perform in order to bear fruit. Our love for God is truly revealed as we act in these loving ways toward one another, and to the "outsiders" we encounter. And, as we welcome, listen to, serve and love others, the impact of that on their lives can have healing, transforming and empowering effects that can flow out to touch others and make a real difference in the world. To change the world, and manifest God's Reign we don't need to do "great" or dramatic things. We simply need to love the people God sends across our path genuinely, humbly and sacrificially.

ONLINE SERMON SOURCES

Please note - if the [www](#) reference at the end of the paragraph does not operate - you have two option (1) copy same to your browser, or (2) Try the title if it is coloured.

Day 1, "[Neither Heaven Nor Hell,](#)" the Rev. Benjamin Anthony. On John 15:1-8. Deals with the early church's concerns about the after-life and uses an illustration from that period to weave in modern concerns and a Christian response to them.
http://day1.org/1250-neither_heaven_nor_hell

America"[In the Assembly of the People,](#)" Dianne Bergant. On "I am the vine, you are the branches" (Jn 15:5). Straightforward exposition with comments on relevance to our times. She states, Today's readings form a kind of triptych, a three-part illustration of what it means to belong to a post-resurrection community."
http://www.americamagazine.org/content/article.cfm?article_id=2958

America"[A Love Song for God's Vineyard,](#)" John R. Donahue. On "*Remain in me, as I remain in you.*" (Jn. 15:4). "John 15 is also characterized by one of the most distinctive Johannine theological concepts, "abiding" (NAB, "remain," also translated as "stay"), which appears over 40 times in that Gospel. Characteristic of John is that terms from daily life—such as *remain, light, water, darkness, walk*—take on profound symbolic meanings, which invite readers constantly to ponder their depth.
<http://americamagazine.org/node/134194>

Sermons that work "Christian Love," the Very Rev. Anthony FM Clavier, Sermons that Work, Episcopal Digital Network. The word on the street is that love is easy. We just do it. We talk about chemistry, and indeed, the scientists tell us that chemistry has something to do with physical attraction. However, we know that love goes further than physical attraction. We love our parents and our children. We love our friends. There's a whole neglected tradition of love between friends that has nothing to do with physical attraction. If we think about it, physical attraction does not necessarily have anything to do with love.

Tomorrow is the feast of Monnica, the mother of Augustine of Hippo, the great scholar, writer, preacher.
<http://episcopaldigitalnetwork.com/stw/2015/04/10/5-easter-b-2015/>

"Day 1 A Message So good as to Border on Folly," the Very Rev. Stephen Carlsen. Like the ancient pagans, many today want to have a little religion at important times, but they also resist allowing God any greater claim on their lives. Perhaps they do not see why God
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deserves any greater commitment. Perhaps they are afraid and wish not to draw attention to themselves by being either too religious or not religious enough. And, perhaps, as is most likely, they just don't see what God has to do with themselves, with their lives.

I am of two minds about such people who approach me for religious ceremonies to be baptized, married or for a burial. On the one hand, I sometimes feel like asking them if they don't really want God in their lives, why they bother at all. On the other hand, I think that a baptism, a wedding, or a funeral are occasions when people can discover that the Church is of value and that God is not distant, fickle but near, present and constant, that God in Christ does care for our lives and that a relationship with God is not arbitrary and vengeful but gentle, warm and gracious.

In the Common Lectionary, our Epistle for this Sunday contains the well-known verse, "God is love." Christians have become very familiar with this idea--and I think too familiar with it.

[http://day1.org/3817-a message so good as to border on folly](http://day1.org/3817-a-message-so-good-as-to-border-on-foolly)

CHILDREN

Worshipping with children -

<http://worshippingwithchildren.blogspot.co.uk/2012/03/year-b-fifth-sunday-of-easter-may-6.html>

Sermons4Kids - sermon of the week

<http://www.sermons4kids.com/>

Talks2Children

<http://talks2children.wordpress.com/>

Post Easter talks at:

<http://talks2children.wordpress.com/category/easter/>

Hymn Suggestions

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling
O Love How Deep, How Broad, How High
Blest Be The Tie That Binds
Come, Let Us All Unite To Sing, God Is Love
Come, Let Us Sing Of A Wonderful Love
Wonderful Love
There Is A Love
Love
May The Words Of My Mouth
Let There Be Love Shared Among Us