



God's Word for this Week

The Fifth Sunday
of Easter

The Collect of the Word

O God,
form the minds of your faithful people,
that we may love what you command
and desire what you promise,
so that, amid the many changes of this world,
our hearts may there be fixed where true joys are to be found:
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you
and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.

Reflections on the 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.

The second emphasis is to "bear fruit". What this fruit might be is explained by the other passages. John's letter explains that the test of 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.



From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
 I will perform my vows
 in the presence of those that fear you.

26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
 those who seek the Lord shall praise him;
 their hearts shall live for ever.

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

28 For the kingdom is the Lord's
 and he rules over the nations.

29 How can those who sleep in the earth
 bow down in worship,
 or those who go down to the dust kneel before him?

30 He has saved my life for himself;
 my descendants shall serve him;
 this shall be told of the Lord for generations to come.

31 They shall come and make known his salvation,
 to a people yet unborn,
 declaring that he, the Lord, has done it.

The First Reading

Acts 8: 26-40



26 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.) ²⁷So 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 ²⁸and

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.

The Second Reading

1 John 4: 7-21

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. ¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world. ¹⁵ God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgement, because as he is, so are we in this world. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹'We love' because he first loved us. ²⁰Those 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. ²¹The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters' also.

The Gospel Reading

John 15: 1-8

¹⁵'I 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.



Living the Scriptures

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 was therefore, in one sense, unclean. He was also willing to meet the man where he was, beginning the 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.

Pause to Pray

Heavenly Father,

In our daily choices and relationships,
in our homes and communities,
May we align ourselves with your love, O God.

In our citizenship and country,
in our national discourse and social participation,
May we align ourselves with your love, O God.

In our world and on the earth,
in our care for the planet, and our sharing of its resources,
May we align ourselves with your love, O God.

And may your love fill the world,
so that followers and leaders,
poor and wealthy,
weak and powerful,
servant and served,
May live aligned to your love.

Amen.

