

St Paul United Church of Christ

Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 2, 2021

Welcome and Announcements

Prayer Requests

Prelude (Recording begins)

Call to Worship

Come, let us gather for the worship of God, and for the sacred communion that unites us in Christ.

Today, we share the bread of life, the holy manna that is the gift of God.

***Hymn**

"We Have Come to Join in Worship"

#647

*We have come to join in worship and adore the Lord our God.
Let us come in prayer, expecting God to speak a mighty word.
All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down.
Christians, pray, and holy manna will be showered all around.*

*See them gather all around you, those he bought at such a cost;
See the weary, see the hurting, see the lonely, see the lost.
Be his hand, and touch the needy; be his gospel, let it sound!
Be his body, and sweet manna will be showered all around.*

*Let us love our God supremely; let us love each other, too.
Let us care for all his people till our God makes all things new.
Christ will call us home to heaven; at his banquet we'll sit down;
Christ himself will rise and serve us living manna all around.*

Opening Prayer

Spirit of God, let us learn now from you. Let us hear once more the words of holy love, so that we may understand by your guidance what the stories of our faith have to say to us. Come speak to us, Holy Spirit, that we may abide in you, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Epistle Lesson: 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.

Hymn

"Blest Be the Tie That Binds"

#393

***Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love;
the fellowship of kindred minds is like to that above.***

***Before our Father's throne we pour our ardent prayers;
our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, our comforts and our cares.***

***We share our mutual woes, each other's burdens bear;
and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.***

***From sorrow, toil and pain, and sin, we shall be free;
and perfect love and friendship reign through all eternity.***

Gospel Lesson: Acts 8:26-40

Then 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.

Sermon

Our lesson this morning from the Acts of the Apostles is the earliest reference to the carrying of the Gospel into Africa, where it bore great fruit in the early church. The evangelist Philip encounters a man who is a castrated slave (a eunuch) of the Kandake, a queen who is monarch of the area generally known as Ethiopia, but may have included other nearby lands. Although a slave, the man holds great power as a court official responsible for the treasury. When Philip finds him, he is reading a passage from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. Followers of Jesus had seen this passage as reflective of the sufferings and death of Jesus, whose life was given for the salvation of the people. This is the passage the man was reading:

He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity, and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised and we held him of no account.

Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By a perversion of justice he was taken away. Who could have imagined his future? For he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people. They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence and there was no deceit in his mouth.

*Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, **he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days**; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:3-11)*

In the ancient world, hope for the future was symbolically tied to having children who would inherit the world created by the present generation. Perhaps this Ethiopian, whose ability to have children had been taken away from him, was especially intrigued by the thought of one who suffered the loss of his own future days, but gave his life for the future of the whole people of God. The story is a wonderful testimony to the way that Scripture of an ancient time can suddenly strike home in unexpected ways and come to have special meaning in our lives.

Today, the nation of Ethiopia is a predominantly Christian land that traces its religious history back to at least the 3rd Century and possibly to this slave of the Kandake who thought that his future had been literally cut off.

Musical Interlude

Jake Rizer

Sacrament of Holy Communion

(Those worshipping with us at home may use whatever food and drink you have available for the Communion elements.)

Come, let us gather at the table of God, where the bread of life and the fruit of God's compassion are shared and all are welcome to celebrate as one. Whoever you are and wherever you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

On the same night on which he was betrayed, our Lord took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it, saying, Take and eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way after supper, he took the cup, saying take and drink. This cup is the new covenant in my blood that is poured out for you and for many for the remission of sin.

Come, Lord Jesus, be among us. Bless this Sacrament of grace. May the food and drink we share be to us the signs of your true presence among us in this place and in our daily walk in fellowship with you. We give you thanks, most holy God, for all the wonders of life we experience as creatures of the world that you have made. We thank you for the blessings and the joys of life with family and friends, the beauty of springtime, and the opportunities of love. We thank you for your teachings, for the commandments that have guided us, and for the great commandment that teaches us to break through the very limits of human love and discover the spiritual universe that makes us one in you. We lift up before you our many needs, for healing, for growing and learning, for understanding and being understood; and we pray that in this hour we may recognize you and experience your transforming influence upon our lives. May we desire to share your good news, as Philip the evangelist did, and may we find meaning and acceptance in the stories of our faith, as the man from Ethiopia did, and may we rejoice together in the bridging of our differences as they and many others have done through the awareness of the grace that is given to us all.

Let us pray in the words that Jesus taught us:

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 debts as we forgive our debtors,

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever. Amen.

Now let us share the Communion meal:

This is the body of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that is given for you. Take and eat. Do this in remembrance of him.

This is the new covenant in the blood of Jesus Christ our Savior that is shed for you for the remission of your sin.

May the Holy Communion of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ our Lord be and abide with us now and forevermore. Amen.

***Closing Hymn**

“As a Fire Is Meant for Burning”

#551

*As a fire is meant for burning with a bright and warming flame,
so the church is meant for mission, giving glory to God’s name.
Not to preach our creeds or customs, but to build a bridge of care,
we join hands across the nations, finding neighbors everywhere.*

*We are learners; we are teachers; we are pilgrims on the way.
We are seekers; we are givers; we are vessels made of clay.
By our gentle, loving actions, we would show that Christ is light.
In a humble, listening spirit, we would live to God’s delight.*

*As a green bud in the springtime is a sign of life renewed,
so may we be signs of oneness ‘mid earth’s peoples, many hued.
As a rainbow lights the heavens when a storm is past and gone,
may our lives reflect the radiance of God’s new and glorious dawn.*

Benediction

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen.

Postlude