

HolyTrinity Anglican Church
Reverend Michael Fleming
Easter 5
May 2, 2021

Celebrant: The parishes of the Diocese of Ottawa sit on the unclaimed territory of the Algonquin peoples.

All: **May we live together in harmony and peace.**

Celebrant: Alleluia! Christ is risen.

All: **The Lord is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Celebrant: May his grace and peace be with you.

All: **May he fill our hearts with joy.**

Celebrant: O God of love, plant us in the soil of your grace. Nurture us with the strength of Christ, the vine of everlasting life. Enlighten us with the wisdom of your Spirit which flows through us today and all days. Abide in us that we may abide in you and live in your love; in your holy name we pray. **Amen**

Celebrant: Almighty God,

All: **to you all hearts are open,**

all desires known,

and from you no secrets are hidden.

**Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,**

that we may perfectly love you,

and worthily magnify your holy name;

through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Celebrant: Glory to God in the highest,

All: **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

Celebrant: Almighty God, your Son Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. He said that he was the vine and we are the branches. Give us grace to love one another and walk in the ways of his commandments; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. **Amen**

The First Reading is from the book of Acts,
Chapter 8, Verses 26 to 40

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”

The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both 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 suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

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

Psalm 22: 25-31

The poor shall eat and be satisfied, and those who seek the Lord shall praise him: “May your heart 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 kingship belongs to the Lord; he rules over the nations.

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

My soul shall live for him; my descendants shall serve him; they shall be known as the Lord’s for ever.

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

The Second Reading is from the first Book of John, Chapter 4, Verses 7 to 21

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Saviour of the world. If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. And so we know and rely on the love God has for us.

God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

This is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Celebrant: The Lord be with you.

All: **And also with you.**

Celebrant: The Holy Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ according to the Blessed St. John (St. John 15: 1-8)

All: **Glory to you, Lord Jesus Christ**

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

The Gospel of Christ.

Praise to you Lord, Jesus Christ

The Homily - “The Ethiopian Eunuch”

Jesus had kept his word. After the resurrection, he told the disciples to go to the Galilee where he would meet them on their home turf. In the familiar hills, he gathered them together and gave them their marching orders: “Return to Jerusalem and wait... wait and my Father will send all you need to fulfill His will and His will is this – to tell others the good news of the kingdom in all the world.” Now, with renewed energy and a burning desire to follow their Lord, they returned to the room where they had begun the final chapter of their journey with Jesus a week or two before and they waited...and waited...and waited. Would Jesus have lied to them? Was all this an illusion, a delusion some of them wondered as the days passed with no sign from either God or Jesus. And then....well you know what happened – PENTECOST happened. They did not understand what was happening except that the room had suddenly felt as if a mighty rushing wind and great light was dancing all around them. Their response to whatever it was that was happening was to get out of the room, run down the side stairs and into the streets of the city where strangers had gathered in response to whatever was going on. Literally falling all over each other in their excitement and haste, the disciples told everyone they met that day of their experience with Messiah Jesus and inviting one and all to join them on the journey forward. Luke tells us in Acts that some three thousand responded to the call that day and soon, the “followers of the Way” as they became known, were held in high esteem in the city because of the good works which they were enacting, especially among the marginalized. Luke writes that they “met constantly to hear the apostles teach, to share the common life, to break bread and to pray. A sense of awe was everywhere and many marvels and signs were brought about through the apostles. All whose faith had drawn them together held everything in common; they would sell their property and possessions and make a general distribution as the needs of each required. With one mind they kept up their daily attendance at the temple, and, breaking bread in private houses, shared their meals with unaffected joy as they praised God and enjoyed the favour of the whole people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those he was saving.” (Acts 2: 42-47)

You would have thought that everyone would have been over the moon with the success of their enterprise – more and more people were being drawn to the message that Peter and the others gave concerning what miracles Jesus had done and describing the kingdom of hope, love, joy and peace which God had promised and shown through the resurrection of his own Son from the dead. But success was a double-edged sword, for the apostles found themselves overwhelmed by the demands now being placed on their shoulders – preaching and teaching, feeding and housing the poor in their midst, finding and distributing resources as the need arose – too much, too much. At last, the early ministry of the apostles got to a breaking point – either something was done or the whole thing would collapse under the weight of the kingdom. Those among the converts who were not Jewish began to complain that the needs of the Gentiles were being ignored in favour of the Jewish community and so, Peter stood among the fellowship one day and said, “It’s all too much for us to undertake single-handedly – choose from among yourselves seven who will carry the pastoral burdens and let us, the apostles of Jesus, do what we were called to do – to preach and teach others.” And thus were seven chosen and called deacons, for they were to do “the work of the people for the people”. Among those called and anointed by the community was a Greek speaker named Philip.

We know very little of his background but this much we do know: he was someone who could act as a liaison between the Jewish converts and those from the Gentile world who were drawn to the mystery

and the light of the Jesus story. Trained by Stephen, the leader of the deacons, he toiled in the vineyard which was the mean streets of the city until Stephen was arrested and executed for heresy and sedition against both the religious and the worldly authorities. After the death of their leaders, some of the deacons left Jerusalem, now convinced that their ministry lay beyond the city walls. Among them was Philip who found himself in the region called Samaria. There, he encountered a man named Simon who claimed to be a magician and healer. He and Philip clashed but eventually the words of Philip resulted in the conversion of many in the city, including Simon Magus. Word got back to Simon Peter that great things were happening in Samaria and so he and John went to investigate the situation. When Simon the magician demanded a share of the power which Philip demonstrated, Peter took him to task for trying to buy a portion of the Holy Spirit and Simon repented. With calm restored, Peter and John returned to the Holy City, leaving Philip to continue his ministry of teaching and healing.

Soon afterwards, Philip heard The Voice which called him away from Samaria. He was sent down the Gaza Road which crossed the Jordanian desert and, on the journey, he underwent a most strange moment. As he traversed the wilderness, Philip saw a cart pulled off the side of the pathway – inside the cart was a man dressed in much finery and reading from a scroll. As Philip passed, the man called out, “Can you help me?” Stopping, Philip discovered that the stranger was from Ethiopia and was a high official of the court of that kingdom. He had been in Jerusalem on official business and while there had met someone who had given him the very scroll he held in his hands. His problem was that he did not understand what was written and hoped that Philip would be able to answer his question, “Who is this lamb led to the slaughter that the author speaks of?” Recognizing the words from Isaiah, Philip sat beside this very important person and began to speak of the One called The Lamb who had been slaughtered just months before in Jerusalem, Jesus of Nazara. By the time they were done, the Ethiopian had asked for and been given baptism in the waters of a small oasis that lay nearby. Philip continued on his journey to Caesarea and the eunuch returned home where legend says he founded a community of Christ-followers there, a community which continues to this very day.

Why is this story important? What is Philip saying to us today some two thousand years after that encounter in the desert place?

I think that here is the person who best exemplifies what our faith is supposed to be all about.

Philip was an explorer – he was most likely a God-fearer, a non-Jewish person who was attracted to the theology and practices of Judaism and who supported the work of the local synagogue while being denied membership because of his Gentile background. This did not stop his desire to understand and immerse himself in the traditions and moral code of and to model his life after the foundations of the Hebrew faith. At some point, perhaps, he met Jesus or one of the apostles and saw in the person of the carpenter from Nazara and the good news he proclaimed of the coming of the long-awaited and anticipated Kingdom of God the fulfilment of all his spiritual needs and desires. Or perhaps he was among those who heard Peter preaching in the streets at Pentecost and was converted then. We do not know the circumstances but we do know that once he joined the Jesus community, he immersed himself in the communal life, particularly in meeting the needs of the Gentile members. Philip put his actions where his faith was and so it was almost a given that when the first deacons were chosen and had hands laid upon them that he would be in their number. He was always open to The Voice and the Spirit, willing to do what God willed because he trusted God with his very life.

Philip was one who saw beyond the narrow confines of his own story to embrace the universal message of hope and love which Jesus proclaimed. He would have agreed completely with what his contemporary Saul of Tarsus wrote, “In Christ there is neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female, slave nor free, but all are one in Christ” and was to live his life dedicated to sharing his joy with all persons wherever the Spirit sent him. He placed no hierarchy amongst people – to him, rich or poor mattered not, for all were invited into the Kingdom; those of the slums were as precious to him as were those who sat on the thrones of power and privilege. Philip was a person who not only assented to the truth of the resurrected Jesus, but risked his life daily to offer others the richness of grace and love which he had been given by God. His love for the Lord was so enriching to him that he not only wanted to share his experience with others, but he felt compelled to do the same. He never hit anyone over the head with his vision of truth, but rather through his compassionate care showed what Jesus’ own brother meant when he wrote, “Do the Word not just read and speak the Word”.

In this time of pandemic when a lot of people are questioning the place of God in their lives and even the presence of God in the reality of the world, we need more Philips to go where the Spirit calls and offer those things so longed for – hope, joy, love and above all an assurance that God, while seeming to some to be absent without leave, is very present in the hands, faces, voices and hearts of those called and sent to share Philip’s diaconate as one who is doing the work of the people for the people.

Pray that the Philip within each of us will be awakened and we will join the company of all those who have said through the centuries, “Here am I Lord....send me.” Amen

The Apostles Creed

Celebrant Let us confess the faith of our baptism, *as we say,*

All I believe in God,

the Father almighty,

creator of heaven and earth.

I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord.

He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit

and born of the Virgin Mary.

He 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,

and is seated at the right hand of the Father.

He will come again

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 of the People

All: We thank you, gracious God, for Jesus Christ the True Vine, with his roots eternally grounded in you. We rejoice that by grace we have been grafted into him, to be branches of the vine which bears the loveliest of all the fruits of the earth. Yet we confess that all is not well with the way we live in your vineyard. Forgive us for those occasions when we have been the ones to introduce disease into the vine, preferring its contamination to the vigours of health. Forgive us for neglecting to draw deeply from the sap of life, for our tendency to wander rather than growing on the framework you provide for being content and sometimes even proud of sparse or undersized fruit, for the apathy which enables us to go through some seasons of life without bearing any fruit at all. Have mercy on us. Do not lose patience with us or sever us completely from the true vine. Rather, heal us of diseases, discipline and train our wandering shoots, prune our unfruitful branches and cut away any which are diseased.

Celebrant: May we remain in Christ and He in us through all the changing seasons of life. Let us delight in bearing good fruit, the fruits of love which are our true purpose and joy. We ask this in his blessed and holy name. Amen

(from The Centre for Mennonite Brothers Studies)

Celebrant: Jesus said, "If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish and it will be done for you". Let us now approach our Lord and Saviour with confidence and hope.

Risen Lord, you came as a sacrifice for our sin. Give us faith to accept this act of love, so that we turn from all human efforts and drink in the atoning righteousness of your death and resurrection... Lord, in your mercy,

All: Hear our prayer

Celebrant: Risen Lord, you are the True Vine and we are the branches. By your Spirit, produce with us the fruits of joy, patience and peace to offer to others so they may taste and enjoy. Keep us from hanging on to your love for ourselves; prune all selfishness from us and fill us with your love. Lord, in your mercy...

All: Hear our prayer

Celebrant: Risen Lord, have mercy upon this earth and supply all her needs. Where and when people are hungry, give them food; when people are in distress, give them comfort; when people are in trouble, bring them order and peace. Turn the whole world to you in faith. Lord, in your mercy...

All: Hear our prayer

Celebrant: Lord Jesus, focus our love on those persons we know who have special needs; hold those who are living in isolation and loneliness in your arms of hope; heal those who are suffering in mind, body and spirit at this time; bless those who feel neglected or ignored and help them to know the depth of your love for them; watch over our parish family, remembering especially at this time Zachariah, Marjorie, Cheryl, Jeanette, Roy, Emerson, Irene, and their families. Lord, in your mercy...

All: Hear our prayer

We remember before Almighty God those who have died in the peace of Christ and have been embraced by the everlasting, everloving and evergiving arms of God, holding particularly today the

soul of our dear sister in Christ, Lynne Gilbert . Rest eternal grant to her O Lord, and let your light perpetual shine upon her. She was Meredith Brophy's mother and we hold Mike, Meredith and the family in our deepest thoughts and prayers this week.

Celebrant: Jesus said, “If you reside in me and my words reside in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done for you”. Friends, we have asked for forgiveness and correction. It has been truly done for us. It is being done for us and it will be done for us. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for hearing us and caring for all our needs. Constantly intercede for us before your Father, our Father and open our eyes so that we may see Him through you. We ask all this in your holy name for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one in three and three in one. Amen
(from re:Worship adapted)

Additional Prayers

All: Lord of the true vine, in you we live and move and find our being. We are the branches, spindly and slight and fragile. We ask our Gardener to prune us gently for we want to bear more fruit for you and for our world. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen

Celebrant: God, you promise never to forsake us but to bring us to life. Nurture us with your presence and sustain us even at the hour of our death. Meet us in our deepest doubts when we feel abandoned, drowning in our fear of being absent from you. Visit us in the tension of our longing for you and our anxiety of feeling alone in this universe that we may sense and know and feel your mercy and grace now and at all times. Amen

All: God of the harvest, gardener supreme, you place us at the centre. Feed us, equip us and having provided for us, help us to seek a new harvest, the harvest of a lives lived in full service to you and your good earth. God of harvest, feed us, prune us, harvest us so that our lives might bring glory to you. Amen

Benediction and Blessing

Celebrant: Go now and love one another because love is from God. Proclaim God’s salvation to every generation; remain in Christ Jesus and like branches of the vine, draw your life from him. And may God the vine-grower, tend you and make you useful; may Christ Jesus abide in and with you and give you the fullness of life; and may the Holy Spirit cast out all fear and fill you with God’s love. So now, go in peace to love and serve the Lord and each other and be happy this week in all the power of the Holy Spirit. (Nathan Nettleton, The Centre for Mennonite Brothers Studies)

All: Thanks be to God. Alleluia