

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Year B
RCL

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

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.”

The Word of the Lord.

SERMON

Welcome to the Fifth Sunday of Easter!

In today’s Gospel, Jesus said, “*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.*”

Branches, vines, pruning, withering branches...of course I need to mention my gardening! You may already know this, but I love to garden.

I remember reviving the planter garden our youth started by the pavilion brick patio. The first time Bishop Bob was here I remember showing him the vegetables and flowers. Bishop Bob looked at me and said that vicars shouldn’t do yard work and they don’t water plants.

I was very surprised and I said, okay. Hmm, I enjoy that, but I knew I had to abide by his recommendation. Later that week, I pulled out the vegetables and made the current succulent garden. Now I don't have to do anything with that!

This morning's gospel is a reminder that we all grow together like a vine and its branches. We all know what happens when a branch falls from a tree. In time, it will wither and die, not bearing any fruit.

To be honest, we all have probably had moments in our lives when we were barely clinging on to Jesus. Maybe there were times when we questioned our faith or asked God, why? Maybe we thought we're free to leave, free to come back, we don't need church now, maybe later. We cherish and need personal space and, personal time. We believe in loving our neighbors, but at a distance!

But here is Jesus challenging us this morning, saying, *“I am the true 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.”*

Jesus is honest and blunt. *“Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.”*

Like a yellow or brown leaf that will never turn green again, the broken branch will never live on the vine and will never bear fruit.

This is Jesus’s image for our spiritual life.

We are all branches on a vine, tangled up together, living interdependently, growing into, around, out, and through each other. We wither when we are apart.

If God is the vine grower, Jesus the vine, and we the branches, we only have one job, “*to abide.*” To stay, to cling, to remain, to depend, to persevere, to tolerate, and to continue to accept. To make ourselves at home with God.

Our lives have not been easy, our branches were pruned, left vulnerable and exposed. We’ve known grief and sorrow.

So we need to stay rooted in one place as we are here at Good Sam. And once we are firmly planted, know that we will support each other to grow and change. We will also sprout new leaves and bear much fruit which we will generously share. We will learn to accept nourishment from strangers. We will feel great joy. We will live a life that is crowded, messy, abundant, and beautiful! We will thrive!

And we need to live and love this life and our God together. In ‘olelo Hawaii, the word is kakou, meaning all of us, everyone. Like the ti leaf lei we are making for Memorial Day, our lives and Jesus’s life is entwined, woven, and bound together forever. This is what we were made for.

As Jesus tells us, *“If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.”*

E pule kakou, let us pray.

O gracious Father, *who openest thine* hand and *fillest* all things living with plenteousness: Bless the lands and waters, and multiply the harvests of the world; let *thy* Spirit go forth, that it may renew the face of the earth; show *thy* loving-kindness, that our land may give her increase; and save us from selfish use of what *thou givest*, that men and women everywhere may give *thee* thanks; through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*