



**COLLECT, READINGS AND REFLECTION  
SUNDAY 28 APRIL 2024- EASTER 5**

**COLLECT**

Risen Christ,  
your wounds declare your love for the world  
and the wonder of your risen life:  
give us compassion and courage  
to risk ourselves for those we serve,  
to the glory of God the Father. Amen.

**Psalm 22. 25-31**

- 25 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.

## Acts 8.26-40

### Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

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.) 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.

***At Morning Prayer, the Gospel is simply the second reading, people sit to hear it and is introduced in the same way as the first:***

The second reading is from John, chapter 15, verses 1-8.

***and then at the end:***

For the word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God.**

***For Eucharists/ Communion people stand to hear the Gospel and it is introduced with an Acclamation, as below:***

Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory.

**Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory.**

I am the light of the world, says the Lord. Whoever follows me has the light of life.

**Praise to you, O Christ, king of eternal glory.**

Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to John, chapter 15, verses 1-8.

**Glory to you, O Lord**

***And then at the end:***

This is the Gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

## John 15.1-8

### Jesus the True Vine

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. 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.

## ***A Reflection from Hannah...***

What can stand in the way of my being baptised? That question cracks something open for the early church. It is hidden in this vivid story of bold faith between two people- Philip, the Evangelist- a member of the early church- and the man I wish they'd named- the Ethiopian Eunuch, who was an important official, working for the Ethiopian Queen. So there is the man who is very much on the inside of Jewish tradition, who has a passion and a gift for sharing the good news of Jesus; and the man who is very much on the outside- an African, someone who's gender identity isn't straightforward, someone from a different religious culture who is intrigued by the words of scripture.

It's a quiet tale, but it contains that magnificent line that still challenges us today- what can stand in the way of my being baptised? Philip, initially at least, has the authority in this encounter. The Holy Spirit leads him to the man- a real-world example of that concept of the vine and branches we hear in our Gospel- he is anchored in the work of God, attentive to the source from which he draws his being. Guided by it, he finds himself at a chariot. Alongside the chariot, Philip notices the Ethiopian man reading the book of Isaiah. The prophecies relating to Christ. It's all been handed to him on a plate- an enquirer, and the scriptures open before them both. Philip gets to work. The man has questions and is receptive to the answers Philip gives. It's an Evangelists' dream!

What at first appears to be a relationship with a clear power dynamic, is in fact a conversation of equals- it always is when the Holy Spirit guides us. It's never about us depositing information onto someone else and then making a judgement about what that means. And Philip nearly falls into that trap, were it not for the Ethiopian Eunuch opening his mind to the scope of the Gospel. What can stand in the way of my being baptised? He says. He's ready. He believes. Remember, this is one point in the history of the church where the idea that it is for everyone- without bounds- is being worked out (we could argue that we're still in that place!). The Ethiopian Eunuch was in so many ways outside the convention of the followers of Christ, that it perhaps didn't occur to Philip that baptism and full family membership was possible. But the man on the outside had thought about that question, and was the one to point out that nothing, in fact, stood in the way.

It's those questions from the 'outside' that sharpen and challenge our faith- and we need them. We need the Ethiopian Eunuch's approach of saying I sense a barrier here, but I think it's in your mind and has nothing to do with the life of God. Shall we name it as empty? What can stand in the way of my being baptised- nothing. Nothing! What joy, what blessing, what freedom there is when questions like that are asked... and answered.