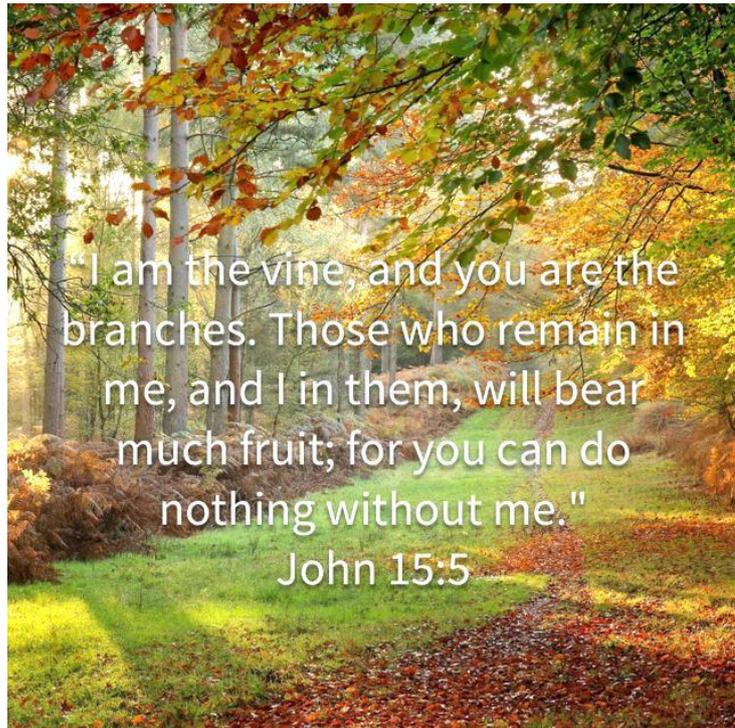


Written Service of the Word – 5th Sunday of Easter
Acts 8.26-40, John 15.1-8 Led by Revd Cannon Louise Shaw



Gathering to worship God

Alleluia. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

The Lord says, 'I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me, and I in them, bear much fruit. Apart from me you can do nothing.'
Come now, as branches of the vine, ready to bear fruit.

Welcoming Hymn Peace, Perfect Peace - 5 verses

Peace, perfect peace, is the gift of Christ our Lord,
Peace, perfect peace, is the gift of Christ our Lord.
Thus, says the Lord, will the world know my friends,
Peace, perfect peace, is the gift of Christ our Lord.

Love, perfect love, is the gift of Christ our Lord,
Love, perfect love, is the gift of Christ our Lord.
Thus, says the Lord, will the world know my friends,
Love, perfect love, is the gift of Christ our Lord.

Faith, perfect faith, is the gift of Christ our Lord,
Faith, perfect faith, is the gift of Christ our Lord.
Thus, says the Lord, will the world know my friends,
Faith, perfect faith, is the gift of Christ our Lord.

Hope, perfect hope, is the gift of Christ our Lord,
Hope, perfect hope, is the gift of Christ our Lord.
Thus, says the Lord, will the world know my friends,
Hope, perfect hope, is the gift of Christ our Lord.

Joy, perfect joy, is the gift of Christ our Lord,
Joy, perfect joy, is the gift of Christ our Lord.
Thus, says the Lord, will the world know my friends,
Joy, perfect joy, is the gift of Christ our Lord.

©1976 *Kevin Mayhew*

Words of welcome

We welcome Revd Canon Louise Shaw to lead us today

Dear Lord, we come as one and we come together,
to draw from the source of your life-giving love,
to reconnect with you and one another via zoom or online
to listen to your word, to meet you in prayer and praise,
and to learn and grow as your faithful disciples –
in Jesus' name. Amen.

Lord, direct our thoughts, and teach us to pray.
Lift up our hearts to worship you in spirit and in truth,
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Collect, the prayer of the week is said.

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

Saying sorry to God

Confession

Christ our passover lamb has been sacrificed for us.
Let us therefore rejoice by putting away all malice and evil
and confessing our sins with a sincere and true heart.

Like Mary at the empty tomb, we fail to grasp the wonder
of your presence. Lord, have mercy.

Lord have mercy

Like the disciples behind locked doors, we are afraid to be
seen as your followers. Christ, have mercy.

Christ have mercy

Like Thomas in the upper room, we are slow to believe.
Lord, have mercy.

Lord have mercy

May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life, through Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen.

Hearing and responding to the Word of God

Reading from Acts 8.26-40

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.

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

Gospel Reading

Alleluia, alleluia. I am the first and the last, says the Lord, and the living one; I was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore. Alleluia

John 15.1-8

‘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

This is the gospel of Christ

Talk –

Revd Canon Louise Shaw

Come with me for a moment back to Chapter 6 of Acts. The number of disciples in Jerusalem is growing. There is persecution but the believers are increasing in number. Not only are they preaching the word of God but they are also caring for those on the very edges of society – the disregarded. We hear in chapter 6 about help for widows are those who are at that time overlooked and in desperate need of help. This help requires a lot of administration and there have been some significant agitations about the fair distribution of money for the care for widows. There has been a contentious split and some are feeling disregarded. So the twelve apostles call together all the believers together and say that they need some help with this. “It is not right for us to neglect the preaching of God’s word in order to handle finances.” (v2) The group are asked to choose seven who are spirit filled and wise who will look after the matter. One of those is Philip. So the Philip in our reading this morning is not an apostle, he is the one who looked after those in need, helping with the social action projects in Jerusalem.

Did you know that, or did you, as I imagined for many years, picture in your mind a super evangelist approaching the foreign, outcast eunuch and asking if he needs help interpreting scripture. Then teaching the Ethiopian about Jesus think of Philip, from a position of authority, graciously accepting him into the community of faith by baptizing him in a nearby body of water. Generously opening up the community of disciples to the foreigner who is searching for truth.

I realise how easy it is to make this assumption. You may not have but I certainly did when I used to hear this account. Made assumptions about power in this relationship. About who knows best. Who has the answers. However Philip is not necessarily well-educated. Philip is engaged in charitable work with those who are underprivileged and on the edges of society. This is where Philip is placed, with the outsiders, and the Ethiopian is an outsider too. The Ethiopian is an outsider because of his race and the fact he is a eunuch. He would have been excluded from the temple and worship – obliged to pray at a distance. He has been drawn to Jerusalem to worship and has a copy or part copy of the scriptures. That is not the whole story, however. The Ethiopian is also a highly educated, wealthy, powerful man. He is in charge of the Queen of Ethiopia's treasury, he is prominent enough to ride in a chariot, and he is wealthy enough to own a scroll.

Although he is not allowed into the temple, the Ethiopian eunuch is returning from his time of worship in Jerusalem and it is as he returns home, reads aloud from the scriptures. It is as he is searching the scriptures that this powerful man meets Philip, who also looks after finances but not in such a grand a way as the official. I am struck about how amazing it is that this prominent Ethiopian official invites Philip into his exclusive chariot. I am not convinced that Philip is looking particularly posh and well connected at this point! However the Spirit of God is moving.

So now they are both in the chariot. The official has already been drawn to look at this passage from Isaiah. He is reading the passage about the suffering servant, "He was humiliated, and justice was denied him." I wonder if those words resonated for the official? He is compelled to find out who the passage is speaking of. He then invites Philip to sit with him, side by side, and asks for some explanation, to journey with him into the scripture, which Philip does.

What an amazing experience not only for the Ethiopian official but for Philip too. What an amazing spiritual moment for the two men. Drawn together from across countries and cultures by God. An encounter that leads the official to stop the carriage, "Here is some water. What is to keep me from being baptised?"

(My goodness – he hadn't even regularly attended worship for a few weeks or done any baptism course)

This account reminds me again, and I need to be reminded frequently as I grow older, that we need to question our assumptions. God loudly and clearly calls us again and again to question our ideas of who we are and who others are; who is the teacher, who has the power, who has authority. Have we ever made assumptions about who needs to hear our opinion, our truth, how we think things should be done (which is of course the right way)? Conversely have we ever felt overlooked or excluded – been on the receiving end of others assumptions due to our race, or age, gender or sexuality.

In this short but life changing account the servant heart of God is revealed to the Ethiopian official. And the Ethiopian official responds from the heart, is baptised and goes on his way rejoicing; and I am sure Philip did too. A new branch is added to the vine.

This morning let us learn again, from this story about two individuals, both outsiders in many ways, incredibly drawn to sit together, to ponder the word of God together, worshipping learning and discovering and ultimately experiencing revelation and new life in Christ.

Affirmation of Faith

We believe and trust in God the Father,
source of all being and life,
the one for whom we exist?

We believe and trust in God the Son,
who took our human nature,
died for us and rose again?

We believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit,
who gives life to the people of God
and makes Christ known in the world?

This is the faith of the Church.
We believe and trust in one God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Prayers of Intercession Mary Jones

Let us pray.

Lord, we have come from different places, with different prayers in our hearts, and different challenges in our lives. But united now, with one voice, we say, thank you, for rooting us together in our church fellowship, where we can pray, grow, play, learn and worship together. Rooted in you, we know fruitfulness is possible, help us to understand that, though there are many branches, we all stem from the one vine, the true vine, our Saviour. And then others, too, may taste and see that you are good. We pray for our church, our worship team, for Louise our area Dean for leading us today and for our Rector Mark during his personal leave. Let us all give wisdom and a fresh commitment to your service in the coming year and may our witness here in Castle Bromwich continue to grow.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

Lord when we are tempted to go our own way, forgive us, and draw us back to the vine of your Church.
When we are tempted to ignore the worries of our friends, forgive us, and draw us back to the vine of your kindness.
When we are tempted to stop praying for the needs of the world, forgive us, and draw us back to the vine of your love.
We thank you that we can always come to you, and trust you with the things in our lives that need to be quietly nurtured and regularly pruned. Only then can we move forward. Help us to be bold in our pruning, so that new life may burst forth into being, in your name.
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

Lord, you have set each one of us into a community, with needs and strengths and weaknesses, thank you for connecting us all through your love. Help us to become a useful part of that community and show us where we are needed most.
We pray this week for all those living in Broomdene Avenue
Let us do all that we can in a spirit of love, reflecting the example of our Saviour, and where we fail, as we know we will, let us above all do no harm.

Give us courage to open a conversation with those we meet.

Give us discernment to understand the yearning of their hearts.

Give us wisdom to explain how Jesus can fulfill their deepest needs.

Give us clarity to invite them to begin a relationship with Jesus.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

We pray for all who feel alone, disconnected or abandoned by their families, their friends or their communities.

We pray especially for those we know who are having a difficult time, who need special reassurance and understanding. Help them to feel your presence with them, and help us to be people who bring hope and love to others.

We pray for those who are in pain, whether of the mind, body or spirit. We pray for all those known to us who are sick and we pray for those whose hearts have been saddened by the death of someone close and dear to them. Be with them and let them know that, whatever they are called upon to undergo, you will always be by their side. May they feel the reality of your everlasting arms, buoying them up on their journey through the vale of tears, whether it be long or short.

We pray for those they have loved and who have recently died and we pray for those whose Anniversaries occur around this time.

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer

Lord as the spring days bring new hopefulness into our lives inspire and envision us for new ways we can bring the kingdom of heaven to earth, and love, hope and comfort to the people in it.

Merciful Father accept these prayers in the name of your son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen

We say the Lords prayer

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come, your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.

Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever. Amen.

An act of Spiritual Communion

You may wish to find a space for prayer in front of a cross, a candle, or a special place.

Lord Jesus Christ, you are the bread of life and the one true vine. We believe that you are truly present in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist.
We seek you. We worship and adore you. Since we cannot receive you in the Eucharistic bread and wine,
We pray that you will come into our hearts and souls, that we may be united to you, by your all-powerful and ever-present Holy Spirit.

Let us receive you, and be nourished by you.
Become for us the manna in our wilderness, the bread of angels for our very human journey through time, a foretaste of the heavenly banquet, and solace in the hour of our death. We pray all this, trusting that you yourself are our Life, our Peace, and our everlasting Joy. Amen.

Hymn Angel-Voices Ever Singing

Angel voices, ever singing,
round thy throne of light,
angel-harps, for ever ringing,
rest not day nor night;
Thousands only live to bless thee,
and confess thee Lord of might.

Thou who art beyond the farthest
mortal eye can see,
Can it be that thou regardest
our poor hymnody;
yes we know that thou art near us
and wilt hear us constantly.

Yes, we know that thou rejoicest
o'er each work of thine;
thou didst ears and hands and voices
for thy praise design;
craftsman's art and music's measure
for thy pleasure all combine.

In thy house, great God, we offer
of thine own to thee;
and for thine acceptance proffer,
all unworthily,
hearts and minds and hands and voices,
in our choicest psalmody.

Honour, glory, might and merit,
thine shall ever be,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
blessed Trinity!
Of the best that thou hast given
earth and heaven render thee.

Words: Francis Pott, 1866

Continue to serve God during this difficult time

Alleluia. Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Eternal God,
whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, and the life:
grant us to walk in his way, to rejoice in his truth,
and to share his risen life;
who is alive and reigns, now and for ever. Amen
As we leave this place, may we abide with God,
grafted and rooted and pruned.
Lord, help us to stay connected to one another and to
you, bearing fruit wherever your love takes us. Amen.

Let us bless the Lord:
Blessing, honour and glory be yours,
here and everywhere, now and for ever. Amen.

We go in peace to love and serve the Lord. Alleluia!
In the name of Christ. Alleluia!

Exit Music - Serenade from Hassan by Frederick Delius

Frederick Delius (1862-1934) wrote this beautiful piece called "Serenade" in the early 1920s for a play called "Hassan". Delius was born in Bradford but spent much of his life in France. I discovered the music in a collection of sheet music passed over to me via Margaret MacLachlan; it originally belonged to her mother Mary. The music shows that she must have played it a lot!

<https://fb.watch/5clogTs41-/>

A service from New Patterns for Worship. Compilation copyright © The Archbishops' Council 2002. Copyright hymns are reproduced under licence CCL1046581 Common Worship: Times and Seasons, material from which may be included here, is copyright The Archbishops' Council 2006 and published by Church House Publishing. Some resources are taken from rootsontheweb.com and is copyright ROOTS for Churches Ltd. Reproduced with permission