

Home Service for 5/2/2021

Welcome and Announcements

You might notice a few changes. You may also find listening to some of your favorite hymns helpful in worship.

Call to Worship:

This is the good news which we proclaim to you.

Jesus Christ is raised from the dead!

Walk in the light of his love.

Live in the light of his teachings and healing mercies.

Come, let us worship the One who overcame death.

Let us celebrate the triumph of our Lord. Amen.

Opening Prayer:

Divine Vinegrower, the soil of your love nurtures the roots of our lives each and every day. As we consecrate ourselves into your loving care, plant us in the soil of your love, that we may abide in Christ, our true vine, and bear the fruit of your love and grace. Give us rain in seasons of doubt and nourish our growth, that our harvest of love may bless the world. In your bountiful name, we pray. Amen.

Prayer of Confession:

God, we confess that we do not have you all figured out, but we act as if we do. We do not wait with patience for your words of wisdom and direction. We raise your banner high but do our own will. Have mercy on us who love you but have not been able to separate our desire for power, our desire to make the rules, our desire to speak for you, from your calling on our lives. Help us, O God, remember that we are mere sinners, seeking your grace.

Words of Assurance

The gospel is foolishness for those who do not understand. For God's power and love are shown not in our strength but in our weakness. All praise for a God who does know us for who we are but still never gives up on us. Amen.

Read Psalm 22

- ²⁵ From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
before those who fear you^[a] I will fulfill my vows.
- ²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the LORD will praise him—
may your hearts live forever!
- ²⁷ All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,
- ²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD
and he rules over the nations.
- ²⁹ All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.
- ³⁰ Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.
- ³¹ They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

Prayers of the People:

God of glory, we gather to celebrate your victory over death and the power of sin. The empty cross and the promise of the resurrection are tangible signs of hope in our broken world. We pray for our brothers and sisters around the world who aren't free to sing their alleluias out loud. We give thanks for those who glorify you this day in places where hope is in short supply — in countries recovering from natural disasters or torn by war. We pray for those who suffer in mind, body or spirit, who lack the strength to sing alleluia. We offer alleluias on their behalf, praying for healing so their voices can join in the joyful songs of praise. We give you thanks for the saints who have gone before us, singing in your heavenly choir, grateful for their lives of faith. Help us live as Easter people throughout the year; let our lives be signs of your unending love. We pray in the name of our risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Lord's Prayer

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 trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is The kingdom, and the power and the glory forever and ever. AMEN

Read the Lesson: Acts 8:26-40

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian^[a] 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, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² 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.

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”^[b]

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ 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?” ^[37] ^[c] ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Read the Epistle Lesson: 1 John 4:7-21

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

¹³ This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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.

¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Read the Gospel Lesson: John 15:1-8

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes^[a] so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ 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.

⁵“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. ⁶If 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. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Message

The title of today’s Epistle Lesson is: “God’s love and Ours,” therefore you should not be surprised that today’s topic is love. We must admit that the worldly view of love is drastically different from God’s view and as Christians our view of love should be the same as God’s.

The word love is used 180 times in the New Testament so it must be an important topic, therefore it must be something that God wants us to understand. John begins by telling us that Love comes from God, and the person who does not love does not know God. In verse 7, John says that love is from God, and we know that God is not of the world. In today’s English the word love has many meanings, so we need to look at the original language of the New Testament, Greek. The Biblical Greek had three words for love; *philia*, *eros* and *agape*. *Agape* is godly love, unconditional and totally unselfish. *Agape* is all giving. The only word John used in this lesson was *agape*. It is a supernatural love that the Holy Spirit can put in our heart and only the Spirit of God can make it real to us. It is the love of God.

Why are we to love? Well, we are commanded to love both in the New and Old Testaments. Lev. 19:18 – “Thou shall not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord.” In John 13:34 – Jesus said; “A commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. We should also love, because God loved us. He showed the greatest act of love there ever could be. In verse 9: “Christ’s death on the cross for you and me is the greatest love that anyone can have.” Remember John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” It does not say only the believers, but it says the world. That means God loves everyone and wants everyone to become a child of God.

God is love and because God loves us, we have God's love to give to others. God does not love in response to our love for Him. God loved us even though as a human race we were totally opposed to Him. When Christ walked the earth majority of the people rejected Him, even though He performed miracles among them, He fed and healed them and even raise some from death. They still cried out for His execution. Jesus Christ submitted Himself to the execution so that these very people could be forgiven. God's love knows not limit. It is a love that forgives over and over again without keeping score and without retaliation. If we have been born of God, if we have experienced His Agape love, we need to love others in the same way.

How are we to love? Love means building another person up, not tearing them down. As Paul says in Corinthians, "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful, it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful, it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." In other words, love meets a person where they are, takes them for what they are, accepts a person for themselves, and then gives the person freedom to grow and mature in themselves and in Christ.

It is always too easy to be negative about someone else, but to love them is to be positive, giving the other the benefit of the doubt, to be accepting, kind, and compassionate.

Someone wrote: Love is:
Slow to suspect--quick to trust.
Slow to condemn--quick to justify.
Slow to offend-- quick to defend.
Slow to reprimand--quick to forbear.
Slow to belittle--quick to appreciate.
Slow to demand--quick to give.
Slow to provoke--quick to conciliate.
Slow to hinder--quick to help.
Slow to resent--quick to forgive.

Love is more than words; it is our actions! How do we love those who do not show us any love? We love them as Christ loved us, our actions will show our love toward them. The rule is very simple. Let us not waste time wondering if we love one another; act as if we do, not to show everyone how great we are at loving others, but to give God the glory, because that kind of love could only come from Him. We need to stop trying to please the world and just preach about God's Love to the world with our actions. We do not have to worry about what the world thinks of us, but to worry that the world needs to see Christ's love in us. There are two responses to being loved by God. The first is to love Him in return. Jesus said, the highest calling God puts on your life is that you love the Lord your God with all your mind and heart and soul and strength. The second response is that we love other people, especially our fellow Christians, for when we put our trust in Jesus Christ, love becomes our heritage.

How does this connect to this morning's Gospel? Israel is described as being the vine or the Vineyard of God. Well the Gospel starts with, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener." A little later, "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." And ending with, "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰ If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."

Jesus is making it clear that salvation comes through faith in Christ. Also, that all who belong to Him are the people of God, and nothing else can set us right with God. It has been said that Christianity added a new rung to the ladder of evolution, producing a new creature, who lives in a new way. This new creature is the Christian. Without Christ this would be impossible, but in Christ, all things are possible. In Christ, we come into a new life which is radically different from the life we were living in the world. The new life comes with new desires, new possibilities, new powers and new outcomes. We are meant to live such lives that others, meeting us, will look at us, and then look from us to Jesus. This is what it means to bear fruit. Jesus is the Vine, we are the branches. We are the Body of Christ. We are Christ's feet, His hands, His body. Christ is calling each of us, to come and help Him save the world. We cannot do it alone, we must be connected to the vine. We must do what the Vine does, and that is what Christ did while He was on this earth. He was never outside the Father's will. We are to be in Christ

just as Christ is in the Father. The Christian life is about an ongoing and intimate relationship with Christ Himself. What good is a profession of faith with no practice, words without deeds. We must abide in Christ! The secret of the life of Jesus was His contact with God the Father. Again and again Jesus withdrew to a solitary place to meet with God. We must be intentional about doing the same that is why we take time to pray. Oh, what love the Father has for us. That love is agape love the unconditional love of God.

We are to love at all times and our love has to be unconditional. The wonderful thing about being made God's children is that He gives us His Spirit to enable us to be like Him, and that likeness is shown clearly in our love for others. As we love one another, God lives in us and His love is perfected in us. May that be the nature of our life together and our witness to the world around us. Do we have an agape love for people? That is what Christ wants us to have so we can show the love of God to the world through our love towards others. Amen.

Benediction:

*Go now, and love one another,
because love is from God.
Proclaim God's salvation to every generation.
Remain in Jesus Christ,
and like branches of a vine, draw your life from him.*

*And may God the vine grower tend you and make you fruitful;
May Christ Jesus abide in you and give you life;
And may the Holy Spirit cast out all fear and fill you with God's love. Go in peace
to love and serve the Lord,
. . . In the name of Christ. Amen.*