

## Ethiopian Eunuch

<sup>26</sup> Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. <sup>27</sup> And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship <sup>28</sup> and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. <sup>29</sup> And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." <sup>30</sup> So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" <sup>31</sup> And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. <sup>32</sup> 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 before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth.*

*<sup>33</sup> In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation?  
For his life is taken away from the earth."*

<sup>34</sup> And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" <sup>35</sup> Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. <sup>36</sup> And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" <sup>38</sup> And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. <sup>39</sup> And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. <sup>40</sup> But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

<sup>7</sup> Beloved, **let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.** <sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>9</sup> In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. <sup>10</sup> **In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved**

**us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup> No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. <sup>13</sup> By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. <sup>14</sup> And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup> Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. <sup>16</sup> So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. <sup>17</sup> By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.**

John 15:1-8

English Standard Version

I Am the True Vine

**15** "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup> Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup> **Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. <sup>5</sup> I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. <sup>6</sup> If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup> If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup> By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.**

**Sermon.** How many of us are pure as the driven snow? Yes, none is the correct answer. While we are created in God's image, as the psalmist tells us, as soon as we enter the world we encounter sin and are influenced by it. Despite our God

given talents and qualities, less desirable ones constantly spring up in our personalities and we spend our lives dealing with them and the array of new ones that come forward as time passes. We have blueberry bushes at home and a few of them periodically have new sprouts that drain the plant and are not suitable for fruit. I keep at them the instant I see them, so that the bush isn't weakened. On the other hand, the old Buck farm up the hill from us had an orchard and beautifully blooming lilacs when I was a teenager. Over the decades the forest has encroached, the orchard was not maintained and the sole survivor is a lilac that I keep after for the sake of memories.

This is where our Gospel text brings us today. Deeply flawed though we may be, God tends us as the Divine vinedresser. Using experiences, friends and mentors as his agents, He trims the harsh bits off. Like the blueberries in our yard, I – we – need to be tended to ensure that those characteristics that are unfortunate do not take hold. If we are to be in His image and model ourselves in Christ, this vine dressing is important. It is, as the hymn writer said, for His glory and our good.

God deals with our individual needs, but, as we talked about with the kids this morning, God is beyond enormous. He is big enough to be sovereign in the entire universe. And that is where our Acts reading takes us.

We live in a world where we are not always nice to each other. We each have our own biases – prejudices – and all too often others experience them as they influence how we treat each other, whether we are intentional or not. It could be anything. Something as trivial as haircuts. Or something as major as race or personal orientation. The Ethiopian in today's Acts text may have had such problems in his interactions. He is in a powerful position – indeed, he is important enough to have his own chariot and driver, with enough room that he and Philip can sit and talk as the chariot is driven. This means some degree of wealth, particularly since the text tells us that he is an important aide to a queen. So, it would not be a surprise if he sets himself apart so that others will not take advantage. He is also a eunuch. Though we have Jesus telling us that this could mean one of three things, let's take it a face value – he is a eunuch in the dictionary meaning. That seems reasonable since in that period – and into the

19<sup>th</sup>, if not 20<sup>th</sup>, century, eunuchs were relied upon by leaders in the East since it was assumed that they would not have a personal agenda and were trustworthy.

So, we have a man who may feel very alone. By definition, he has no family. Based on specific mandate in Deuteronomy he can never be part of the assembly of Israel. We can wonder about his reception in Jerusalem, although my guess is that the Temple authorities would have ignored his physical condition and happily taken his money for offerings. Based on this pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the fact that he seems to own a scroll of the book of Isaiah, he seems to be a serious God-fearer, searching for God and meaning. Interestingly, he is reading Isaiah – a Messianic section – but Isaiah is also the book that affirms God’s embrace of faithful eunuchs, despite the prohibitions in Deuteronomy. He wonders about the meaning of the text and it is by Divine plan that Philip finds him at that moment.

Philip does what he has come to do – spends time and assists the eunuch in interpreting the text from the Christian perspective. Somewhere in this Philip must have spoken of baptism and, by Divine hand, there is water and the eunuch seeks immediate baptism. The Gospel has taken hold in this man’s heart and soul. While ritual bathing exists in Judaism, baptism is unique to Christianity – that the eunuch requests this underscores the importance of the Good News to him and the impact of Philip’s time with him. Philip is an agent of the Divine vine dresser.

Lastly, in our epistle text John sums things up well. It is all about love. The love that God has for us and models for us to apply to each other.

How do we translate that Christ-given mandate to love each other into our own lives? Well, as we talked about last week, one approach would be to list what such love would not have. How often are we, in one form or another, the self absorbed driver we saw yesterday cutting directly across traffic in order to score a parking spot at Tilton’s? Do we consider others as we sort out what we are planning to do? Do we consider the impact, for example, of our words?

Perhaps the eunuch knows that so much of the world is ephemeral – blown in on the wind and blown away just as quickly. Perhaps he realized that for all of

his wealth and position he had nothing of true substance. It certainly reads that the text, amplified by Philip, spoke to him. Perhaps conveying to him that his value was beyond keeping the books for the queen. That he, as one of God's children, had that foundational and important value that only the Creator could provide. That he had been covered by God's grace in Christ and could be that person of the Creator and not just the queen.

The plight of the eunuch reminded me of something written by the folks at the 20Schemes project in Scotland -

*Jesus are you there? Jesus do you care?  
Can your blood, Your grace cover me?  
Jesus are you there? Jesus do you care?  
Was your cross, Your death enough for me?*

This could have been very much like the question the eunuch was asking. Am I too sinful for God to reach out for me. Am I too sinful for God's grace to reach and cover me. And those are the questions we may ask for ourselves. And we know the answers – yes, He cares and yes, His grace is enough – more than enough – to cover us.

So, we have the Gospel being shared fully with someone as foreign as they come – in order that God may be glorified. We have the branches being tended for the same reason. And, the epistle tells us that the end result for us as His people is that we would show love for each other. Indeed, how can we be His people if we do not express to each other the love that God has called us to?

Think about this in your daily life. What pieces of it are not glorifying God? Should they be pruned off? Is there an attractiveness to gossip, to talk out of school about people? Is there an attractiveness to be judgmental about others? Do we dismiss others who are unlike ourselves? How, exactly, do we convey God's love to others? We cannot possibly do this ourselves. But, we can by God's grace alone, in faith alone, in Christ alone, guided by Scripture alone, so that our every moment may give all glory to God alone.

Soli Deo gloria. Amen.