



BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

Easter 5, Year B
April 29, 2018

[RCL]: Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:24-30; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

Acts 8:26-40

In this passage from Acts, we hear of a eunuch from Ethiopia making a pilgrimage from his homeland to Jerusalem. The audience of the book of Acts would have been curious about this figure. A person from a distant land whose appearance was different from theirs would have intrigued the audience. As a court official in charge of the Ethiopian queen's treasury, the eunuch is a powerful individual. We observe that he does not display his power in this conversation, but instead humbles himself before Philip, inviting him to sit with him and explain the text from Isaiah. While we do not know his religious background, we do know he came to Jerusalem to worship and was curious about the Hebrew scriptures. The eunuch's desire for baptism unfolds through his illumination by scripture and Philip's proclamation. The passage reveals the inclusive nature of baptism; regardless of one's national origin or position, all are invited into the baptism of Christ. Furthermore, we see the power of the Good News in Christ evoke joy within him.

- How might God be inviting us to illuminate scriptures for people in our lives?
- How do we see Christ unfolding in the lives of people whom we encounter who are from cultures, backgrounds, or countries different from our own?

Psalm 22:24-30

This section of Psalm 22 reveals a people who are devoted to loving and praising God. They recognize God's faithfulness, which evokes a desire to live for God. This devotion is not lived in isolation, but rather expressed in community. In fact, the Psalm describes, "All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall bow before him" (v. 26).

- How does praising God in your faith community shape the culture and experience of the community?
- How does praising God in your faith community shape its relationship with God?

1 John 4:7-21

This reading from John is a beautiful and moving description of God's love. The love revealed in and through us is one of many ways God's love is manifested in the world. As followers of Jesus, we are exhorted to express God's love not simply in emotions or attitudes, but also through concrete and visible deeds and actions.

There is no question as to whether or not God loves us - God does. A question we are invited to ponder is: To what extent do we reveal God's love by loving one another? When we love each other, God's love is being perfected within and among us. This is true not only of our individual interactions, but also of our corporate actions in our parish, in our diocese, in the Episcopal Church, in the Anglican Communion, and in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church we profess in the Nicene Creed.

- What actions might God be inviting us to undertake, individually and corporately, to more fully reveal God's love to one another, in our communities, and throughout the world?

John 15:1-8

Today's Gospel reading centers around a conversation between Jesus and the disciples. Jesus describes for them how to be sustained in life - by abiding in him. Just as the life of a branch is sustained by being connected with the vine, our lives are sustained through our relationship with Christ. We are already in union with Christ; we are encouraged to draw our attention to abiding within that union.

The passage also describes how the vinegrower periodically prunes the branches so that they can bear more fruit. Like a branch being pruned, there may be times in one's life when one's circumstances cause a person to let go of a commitment, habit, or some other aspect of life in order to eventually live more fully and fruitfully. By drawing one's attention to abiding in Christ, a person can be brought to a greater sense of peace and be better prepared to discern, navigate, and embrace seasons of pruning and flourishing.

- What practices draw your awareness to abiding in Christ?
- How has a period of pruning in your life eventually brought you to a place of living a more flourishing, fruitful life?

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