

Service for Week 22nd – 28th April 2024

5th Sunday of Easter By Chaplain Andy

Our Opening Prayer.

There's a wideness in God's mercy
Like the wideness of the sea;
There's a kindness in his justice
Which is more than liberty.

For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind;
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind. **Amen**

(from the hymn by John Stainer)

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven,
Hallowed be Thy name.....

Amen

Philip and the Ethiopian Acts 8:26-40

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet.

The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it." Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. The eunuch was reading this passage of

Scripture: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both 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 suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Holy words, Holy wisdom,

Thanks be to God.

Reflection

In the gospels we read how Jesus acted against some of the conventions and attitudes of the society in which he lived. You may remember that he healed the sick on the Sabbath Day and the religious leaders criticized him

because that was considered 'work' which you were not allowed to do on the Sabbath.

Jesus went against convention when he talked to the Samaritan woman at the well. The Jews did not have anything to do with Samaritans, also men were not supposed to talk to women who were on their own in that society. Jesus' disciples and followers also did things that they were not supposed to do such as not fasting when they were normally meant to.

Philip, a disciple of Jesus in another biblical account as we heard in our reading was on a journey from Jerusalem to Gaza. On his way there Philip meets an Ethiopian who, as Philip is passing by, is sitting in his chariot reading scripture. Now this Ethiopian man, being the treasurer for the Queen of Ethiopia was an important official and is also described as a eunuch. We can't be certain why this man was a eunuch; eunuchs were retained by royal households in those times usually because kings had many wives or concubines and eunuchs were trusted. Also, we can't be certain from the translation the exact meaning of the term eunuch - it may mean, being castrated, having undeveloped sexual organs or it may be a man who did not have sexual relationships with women. So it could be that the Ethiopian was asexual or homosexual.

The Ethiopian was reading passages from the Old Testament in the book of Isaiah and asked Philip to explain it to him. Philip tells him that what he is reading was a prophesy about a coming Messiah, and the good news is that Jesus is the Messiah, so Isaiah's prophesy has come true.

Our societies' attitude today has changed dramatically over the past few years. Homosexuals, lesbians and people with a different sexual orientation were discriminated against in the past but this has changed. Many of our churches to their shame did not accept those that lived differently and did not follow convention, but this has changed. We also have now homosexual, lesbian and trans vicars and ministers.

I believe this is a good and right thing that is in the Spirit of Jesus. It should have happened a long time ago because it demonstrates that God's love accepts all. Nobody is excluded just as Philip demonstrated that God fully accepted the Ethiopian man when he baptized him.

Amen

Closing Prayer

Living God, teach me to hear your cry in the suffering of the sick and the sorrow of the bereaved. To hear your call in the misery of the lonely and the despair in those discriminated against.

Amen.