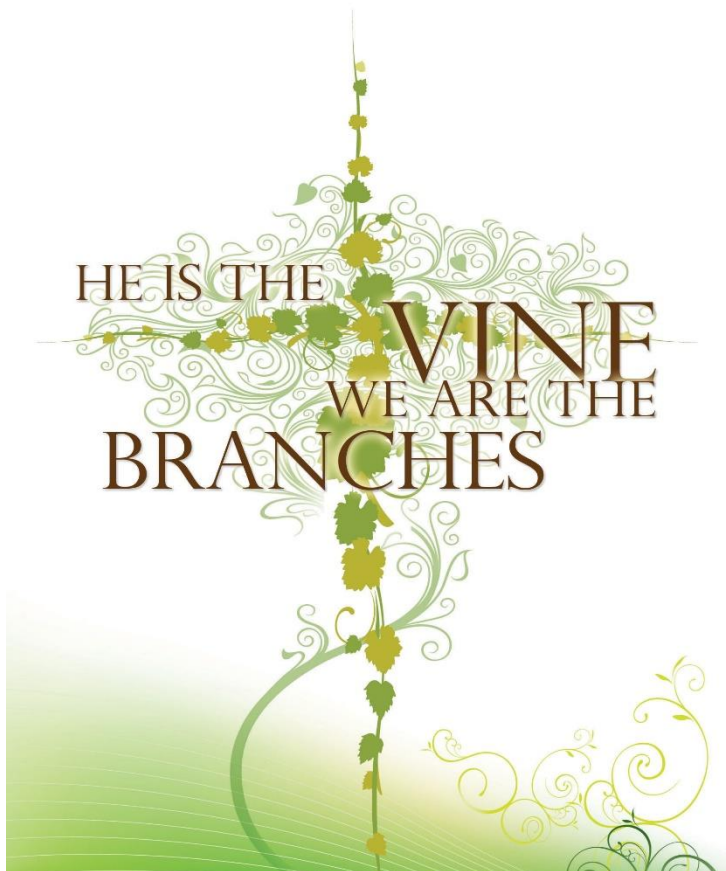


**The Lutheran Church of the Covenant**  
*“Reaching Out, Reflecting Christ, Renewing Lives”*



*Fifth Sunday of Easter*  
*May 2, 2021*



**Evangelical Lutheran Church in America**

God's work. Our hands.



We welcome you to worship here at the Lutheran Church of the Covenant! We continue to do our best in providing the safest environment possible for you to worship our Risen Lord with your whole heart, even during these COVID-19 times. Here are the precautions we are taking on behalf of our whole community of faith, so that we best care for one another and those we are around during the week.

- We ask you wear a mask the entire time you are in the building, unless you have a medical condition preventing you from doing so.
- Bulletins and individual Communion elements are available for you to pick up as you enter from the back of the sanctuary. The Communion elements are available in wine and grape juice form as well as wheat and gluten-free wafers. We will partake of the body and blood of Christ together from our respective seats.
- There will not be a separate time for an offering to be collected for supporting our congregational and wider-church ministry, and so an offering basket is placed beside the bulletins and Communion elements, for those who wish to give this day.
- We are asking you to refrain from singing, as we do our best to minimize the spread of droplets and aerosols around our masks. You may do so in your heart, where we believe God hears just as well as if spoken or sung aloud. We, also, ask that you continue participate throughout the worship by speaking the **bold** print, but doing so in a whisper voice.
- There will not be a time for sharing of the peace, but we encourage you to do so with one another before or after the worship (while maintaining the physical distancing recommendations of six feet).
- There will not be a processional or recessional of the cross, nor will there be a receiving line with the pastor after the worship. If you wish to speak for Pastor Brad, for any reason, please do not hesitate to contact him through email, text or calling him directly.

We thank you for your patience and understanding as we will always err on the side of caution while knowing that we can still transmit the virus even with the full vaccination.

## **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

*This Sunday's image of how the risen Christ shares his life with us is the image of the vine. Christ the vine and we the branches are alive in each other, in the mystery of mutual abiding described in the gospel and the first letter of John. Baptism makes us a part of Christ's living and life-giving self and makes us alive with Christ's life. As the vine brings food to the branches, Christ feeds us at his table. We are sent out to bear fruit for the life of the world.*

Prelude *O Blessed Spring* (HANSEN)

\*Thanksgiving for Baptism

*All may make the sign of the cross, the sign marked at our baptism, remembering our everlasting bond with our Risen Lord.*

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Refreshed by the resurrection life we share in Christ,  
let us give thanks for the gift of baptism.

We thank you, risen Christ,  
for these waters where you make us new,  
leading us from death to life, from tears to joy.  
We praise you, Holy Spirit,  
for coming to us in these grace-filled waters of rebirth,  
like rains to our thirsting earth,  
like streams that revive our souls,  
like cups of cool water shared with strangers.  
Breathe your peace of serenity  
on your whole church when we hide in fear.  
Clothe us with your mercy and forgiveness.  
Send us as loving companions on our journey  
as we share your new life among us.  
Make us one, risen Christ.  
Cleanse our hearts. Shower us with life.  
To you be given all praise, with the Holy Spirit,  
in the glory of God, now and forever. **Amen.**  
Gathering Hymn *Like the Murmur of the Dove's Song*

#403

Text: Carl P. Daw Jr., b. 1944

- 1 Like the murmur of the dove's song,  
like the challenge of her flight,  
like the vigor of the wind's rush,  
like the new flame's eager might:  
come, Holy Spirit, come.
  
- 2 To the members of Christ's body,  
to the branches of the vine,  
to the church in faith assembled,  
to our midst as gift and sign:  
come, Holy Spirit, come.
  
- 3 With the healing of division,  
with the ceaseless voice of prayer,  
with the power to love and witness,  
with the peace beyond compare:  
come, Holy Spirit, come.  
my dwelling-place shall be.

#### Prayer of the Day

O God, you give us your Son as the vine apart from whom we cannot live. Nourish our life in his resurrection, that we may bear the fruit of love and know the fullness of your joy, through Jesus Christ, our risen Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

First Lesson

Acts 8:26-40

*Led by the Spirit, Philip encounters an Ethiopian official who is returning to his African home after having been to Jerusalem to worship. Philip uses their encounter to proclaim*

*the gospel to him. Upon coming to faith in Jesus, he is baptized by Philip.*

<sup>26</sup>An angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) <sup>27</sup>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 <sup>28</sup>and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. <sup>29</sup>Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” <sup>30</sup>So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” <sup>31</sup>He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside 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 silent before its shearer,  
so he does not open 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>The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” <sup>35</sup>Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. <sup>36</sup>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?” <sup>38</sup>He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. <sup>39</sup>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. <sup>40</sup>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.

Word of God, word of life.

**Thanks be to God.**

Psalm

Psalm 22:25-31

<sup>25</sup>From you comes my praise in the great assembly;  
I will perform my vows in the sight of those who fear the LORD.

<sup>26</sup>**The poor shall eat and be satisfied,  
Let those who seek the LORD give praise! May your hearts live forever!**

<sup>27</sup>All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD;  
all the families of nations shall bow before God.

<sup>28</sup>**For dominion belongs to the LORD,  
who rules over the nations.**

<sup>29</sup>Indeed, all who sleep in the earth shall bow down in worship;  
all who go down to the dust, though they be dead, shall kneel before the LORD.

<sup>30</sup>**Their descendants shall serve the LORD,  
whom they shall proclaim to generations to come.**

<sup>31</sup>They shall proclaim God's deliverance to a people yet unborn,  
saying to them, "The LORD has acted!"

## Second Lesson

1 John 4:7-21

*We love God and others because God first loved us. We cannot say we love God, whom we have not seen, while hating fellow Christians, whom we regularly see. Love toward God is to be matched by love toward others because the essence of God is love.*

<sup>7</sup>Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup>Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. <sup>9</sup>God's love was revealed among us in this way: 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 loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. <sup>11</sup>Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. <sup>12</sup>No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives 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 do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. <sup>15</sup>God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. <sup>16</sup>So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. <sup>17</sup>Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so 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 reached perfection in love. <sup>19</sup>We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup>Those who say, "I love

God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. <sup>21</sup>The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Word of God, word of life.

**Thanks be to God.**

\*Gospel

John 15:1-8

*On the night of his arrest, Jesus taught his disciples about the relationship they would have with him. Those who abide in his word and love bear fruit, for apart from him, they can do nothing.*

[Jesus said:] <sup>1</sup>“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. <sup>2</sup>He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. <sup>3</sup>You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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. <sup>6</sup>Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. <sup>7</sup>If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. <sup>8</sup>My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

This is the holy Gospel of our Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

Sermon

Hymn of the Day *O Blessed Spring*

#447

Text: Susan Palo Cherwien, b. 1953

1 O blessed spring, where word and sign  
embrace us into Christ the Vine:

here Christ enjoins each one to be  
a branch of this life-giving Tree.

- 2 Through summer heat of youthful years,  
uncertain faith, rebellious tears,  
sustained by Christ's infusing rain,  
the boughs will shout for joy again.
- 3 When autumn cools and youth is cold,  
when limbs their heavy harvest hold,  
then through us, warm, the Christ will move  
with gifts of beauty, wisdom, love.
- 4 As winter comes, as winters must,  
we breathe our last, return to dust;  
still held in Christ, our souls take wing  
and trust the promise of the spring.
- 5 Christ, holy Vine, Christ, living Tree,  
be praised for this blest mystery:  
that word and water thus revive  
and join us to your Tree of Life.

*\*Prayers of Intercession*

On this fifth Sunday of Easter, let us unite in Christ to pray for all in any need,  
responding to each petition with the words, "make us one in you."

*A brief silence.*



God of triune mystery, as you have formed your church to be one fruitful vine, strengthen our churches and our ecumenical connections with Christians across the street and around the globe. As you brought the Ethiopian eunuch to baptism, lead all Christian communities to welcome people of each sexual identity, every skin color, and all national backgrounds. Hear our prayer, O loving God: **make us one in you.**

As you created an earth with countless forms of plant and animal life, train us to honor and maintain the bountiful earth that you intend for us and future generations. Hear our prayer, O creating God: **make us one in you.**

As you call humankind to live in love with one another, bring peace to nations, to neighborhoods, and to homes. Protect the oppressed and the vulnerable in every land, show us the path to nonviolence in all things. Hear our prayer, O reconciling God: **make us one in you.**

As you have promised to hear the cries of all the needy, we lift up the countless people around the world who are suffering from sickness, from the coronavirus, from injustice, from abuse, from starvation. Hear the pleas for India, and for those near and dear to us. Hear our prayer, O healing God: **make us one in you.**

We remember those who have died in the faith. As you have promised to bring your people into your strong and tender embrace, preserve us until we enter with all the saints into your everlasting mercy. Hear our prayer, O eternal God: **make us one in you.**

Into your hands, O living God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in your mercy, through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. **Amen.**

\*Thanksgiving at the Table

Holy, living, and loving God,

we praise you for creating the heavens and the earth.

We bless you for bringing Noah and his family through the waters of the flood,

for freeing your people Israel from the bonds of slavery,

and for sending your Son to be our Redeemer.

We give you thanks for Jesus  
who, living among us,  
healed the sick,  
fed the hungry,  
and with a love stronger than death,  
gave his life for others.

In the night in which he was betrayed,  
our Lord Jesus took bread, and gave thanks;  
broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying:  
Take and eat; this is my body, given for you.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Again, after supper, he took the cup, gave thanks,  
and gave it for all to drink, saying:  
This cup is the new covenant in my blood,  
shed for you and for all people for the forgiveness of sin.  
Do this for the remembrance of me.

Remembering, therefore,  
his life-giving death and glorious resurrection,  
we await your promised life for all this dying world.

Holy Spirit, breathe on us and on this bread and cup:  
carry us in your arms from death to life,  
that we may live as your living disciples,  
clothed in the righteousness of Christ.

Through him all glory and honor is yours, Almighty Father, with the Holy Spirit,  
both now and forever. **Amen.**

**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.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours,  
now and forever. Amen.**

Communion

Music Interlude *Now the Green Blade Rises* (SHEHI)

Prayer after Communion

Wellspring of joy,  
through this meal you have put gladness in our hearts.  
Satisfy the hunger still around us,  
and send us as joyful witnesses,  
that your love may bring joy to the hearts of all people,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
**Amen.**

Blessing

May our glorious God grant you a spirit of wisdom  
to know and to love the risen Lord Jesus.  
The God of life,  
Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit,  
bless you now and forever.  
**Amen.**

Sending Hymn *Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ*

#674

Text: Fred Kaan, b. 1929

1 Let us talents and tongues employ,  
reaching out with a shout of joy:  
bread is broken, the wine is poured,  
Christ is spoken and seen and heard.

### *Refrain*

Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,  
pass the Word around: loaves abound!

Jesus lives again, earth can breathe again,  
pass the Word around: loaves abound!

2 Christ is able to make us one,  
at the table he sets the tone,  
teaching people to live to bless,  
love in word and in deed express. *Refrain*

3 Jesus calls us in, sends us out  
bearing fruit in a world of doubt,  
gives us love to tell, bread to share:  
God (Immanuel) ev'rywhere! *Refrain*

### Dismissal

Alleluia! Christ is risen.

**Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

Go in peace. Share the good news. Alleluia!

**Thanks be to God. Alleluia!**

Postlude *We Know That Christ Is Raised* (LARSON)

### **Praying Together**

**... for those who are homebound, ill, hospitalized or recuperating:** Gayle Agg, Bob Buettner, Alexis Carr, Joan Clarke, John Crawford, Nicole Crawford, Barbara Fossa, Carolyn Frajter, Ken Frajter, Nealie Gage, Barb Gaglione, Michelle Garnett, Rosa Garnett, Jim Gradert, Alex Hohenstein, Judy Jones, Dylan King, Jason Lanese, Andrea Lanzalaca, Phyllis Nemeth, Bernice Novak, Don Rusher Jr, Arlene Stoltz, Marie Storms, Tim Susanek, Tom Susanek, Phyllis Treichel, Phyllis Welker, Linda Wright, Wilma Dancy, Bill Helmick, Nancy Helmick, Robert Lambrecht, Kim (Novak) Leonhardt, Laura Mele, Judy Morgan, Kris Sandor, Bill Wilkens, Eugene Winfrey, the Copeland/Lane Family

**LAST WEEK**

## ***Lectionary Blog: The African Eunuch, the Spirit's Priority***

For me, the narrative of the Ethiopian eunuch is one of the most heartbreaking, yet affirming, stories in all of Scripture. But to understand why, we need to know a bit about who he was and where he came from.

In the time of Jesus, Ethiopia wasn't the East African country that we think of today but was roughly analogous with the territory of biblical Kush. This land would have covered most of today's Sudan and parts of upper Egypt, with Meroë as its capital. There are traditions that say Ethiopia was ruled over by Candaces, or queens (Acts 8:27), including Amanitire, the Candace closest to the timeframe of the eunuch of Acts ("Candace and the Queen of Sheba," *New Testament Studies, II*).

Further, there was an early tradition that Solomon loved the Queen of Sheba and sent her home with gifts from his royal bounty and at least one child that he had fathered. Origen argued in his commentary on the Song of Songs that the woman pursued by Solomon was the Queen of Sheba, who was "black and beautiful" (Songs 1:5). Ethiopian Christians and Jews have long held that, when Solomon gave the Queen of Sheba "every desire that she expressed" (1 Kings 10:13), she had asked for sexual relations and children. The next chapter of 1 Kings points out that Solomon did carry on relationships with many foreign women of noble birth (11:1-3).

Ancient Jewish and Christian sources (Irenaeus and Jerome among them) agreed that the descendants of the Queen of Sheba by Solomon, and accordingly the Ethiopian eunuch in particular, were to be regarded as at least partially Jewish. This week's Gospel lesson also points to the eunuch's embrace of Judaism through his attempt to visit the Jerusalem temple and his reading of the prophet Isaiah. As will be discussed below, he probably was regarded as someone who was born Jewish, not a convert to Judaism. It is for this reason that Cornelius and his household are regarded as the first gentile baptized converts to Christianity (Acts 10:45-48), not the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8. Even related groups who were co-descendants of Abraham, like the Edomites, were to be welcomed into the temple and embraced (Deuteronomy 23:7-8) long before the existence of a "court of the gentiles."

But if the eunuch was another of the thousands of Jews (Acts 2) or even related groups such as the Samaritans (Acts 8:4-25) who had already received the Spirit, why does his case merit special mention? Just as Jesus commanded, the gospel was being preached in

expanding circles, first Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, then all the earth (Acts 1:8). This Ethiopian represented an allied group that had split off from the Israelites generations earlier than the Samaritans, but they were still “family” to be reached before the gentiles.

The reason for including the Ethiopian’s story is the bodily reality of a eunuch. As a eunuch, he may have been prevented from entering the temple compound (Deuteronomy 23:1). Without needing to check his private parts, temple guards would have been able to clearly see the effects of several years, perhaps a lifetime, of a lack of testosterone and the presentation of female secondary-sexual characteristics. The guards may have already been suspicious of court officials who came from lands that were known to create eunuchs.

The Ethiopian eunuch made the journey from Meroë to Jerusalem, a distance of about 1,500 miles. At the end of that journey, he might have been refused entrance to the baptismal pools in which Jews and new converts to Judaism became ritually pure before entering the temple compound. The hopeful words of Isaiah 56:3-5 about eunuchs being included in temple service wasn’t considered authoritative Scripture by the Zadokites (Sadducees) who primarily administered the compound. Thus the eunuch was probably kept out and excluded.

It’s difficult for me to imagine his disappointment and hurt at being refused entrance to participate in worship because of what had been done to his body. He must have been crushed as he was riding home. That he was reading the prophet Isaiah at all instead of giving up on a temple system that possibly prohibited him from full participation is testimony to his faithfulness to God. Phillip heard him reading the particularly applicable passage:

*In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.  
Who can speak of his descendants? (Isaiah 53:8).*

The anguish of soul that this man must have felt reading about humiliation, deprivation of justice and lack of descendants must have been tortuous after being turned away from his pilgrimage to the temple.

Into his despair, the Spirit brought Phillip to explain that this passage pointed to the messiah. Jesus, who was also humiliated and deprived of justice. Jesus, who also would not have a family or descendants. The eunuch’s next question to Phillip must be read in

this context. If Jesus, the messiah and the holy one of God, could empathize with this man's suffering, what was to stop him from finally being baptized and declared pure and whole? Nothing! He wasn't just displaying eagerness to be baptized but making sure that nothing still stood in the way of his being recognized as a full member of God's kingdom. Even after Phillip was taken away, the eunuch, recognized as a whole and complete person, went on his way rejoicing (Acts 8:39). I believe this is one of the greatest understatements in Scripture.

Phillip had already shared the message of Jesus with the Samaritans. Now God expanded the community to include not just Ethiopian descendants of Solomon's royal line, but a man who may have been excluded from worshiping in the temple because of his nonbinary gender-conforming body. And please make no mistake: a dark-skinned African with sex-reassignment surgery was welcomed into the kingdom of heaven by special appointment of the Spirit before the first European converts were also welcomed. Phillip helped expand the understandings of who was part of God's beloved community, to include even the previously restricted. In this way, he was truly bearing much fruit for the kingdom.

*Cory Driver is a minister of word and service, and the director of the Transformational Leadership Academy in the Indiana-Kentucky Synod. He earned his doctorate in Jewish religious cultures from Emory University, Atlanta. Cory lives with his family in Indianapolis.*

# The True Vine

"I am the vine: you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.," John 15:5 (NIV)



The puzzle is based on John 15:1-8

R P O W M P N S I O N F J X Z  
S E O G A Z Y M H A P B K G X  
N S M L D R W O E P P V T P W  
X C U A Y R M L X N X S A Y K  
B P P L I A C R T N M F R Z A  
X K R N N N A I H W O R D S J  
C S U N L E D A R G J N R K X  
J J N Q B A K E O L G E V Y T  
B E E P W I G J W O U F Y I C  
R B S W N I D Z N R O E U V E  
A U Z N N H T B T Y G R X N J  
N R F D P W H H J Z F N I F H  
C N S I J F M K E G B V Y B G  
H E Q E R H X G A R D E N E R  
U D F V A E W R Z U S S G G E

WORDS  
CLEAN  
FRUIT

GARDENER  
PRUNES  
BRANCH

REMAIN  
THROWN  
FIRE

BEAR  
VINE  
WITHERS

GLORY  
TRUE  
BURNED