

THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
MAY 2, 2021

ST. PAUL'S LUTHERAN CHURCH, FALLS CHURCH, VA



PRELUDE *Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won* Setting: Carl F. Schalk

WELCOME

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

ENTRANCE HYMN #490 *Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won*

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| <p>1 Jesus lives! The vict'ry's won!
Death no longer can appall me;
Jesus lives! Death's reign is done!
From the grave will Christ recall me.
Brighter scenes will then commence;
This shall be my confidence.</p> <p>2 Jesus lives! To Him the throne
High above all things is given.
I shall go where He is gone,
Live and reign with Him in heaven.
God is faithful; doubtings, hence!
This shall be my confidence.</p> | <p>3 Jesus lives! For me He died,
Hence will I, to Jesus living,
Pure in heart and act abide,
Praise to Him and glory giving.
All I need God will dispense;
This shall be my confidence.</p> <p>4 Jesus lives! I know full well
Nothing me from Him shall sever.
Neither death nor pow'rs of hell
Part me now from Christ forever.
God will be my sure defense;
This shall be my confidence.</p> |
|--|--|
- 5** Jesus lives! And now is death
But the gate of life immortal;
This shall calm my trembling breath
When I pass its gloomy portal.
Faith shall cry, as fails each sense:
Jesus is my confidence!

INVOCATION

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we come into the Lord's presence on this day, it is right for us to examine our lives in light of the will of God, to confess our sins, and to ask for God's forgiveness. We do this in the sure and certain hope that God will keep His promise and give us the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation for the sake of Jesus Christ. Let us then take time to recall the ways we have failed to uphold God's Law this week and confess these sins to Him.

(We observe a moment of silence for self-reflection.)

Most merciful God,

We confess our inability to be faithful in our promises to you and to walk in the way of Christ. We have neglected to serve others and have sought our own well-being rather than good for all. Acknowledging our sin, we look to you for mercy and healing. Strengthen our faith, increase our hope, and guide us in the path of humble service. Amen.

In the mercy of almighty God, Jesus Christ was given to die for us, and for His sake God forgives us all our sins. To those who believe in Jesus Christ He gives the power to become the children of God and bestows on them the Holy Spirit. May the Lord, who has begun this good work in us, bring it to completion in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.

KYRIE

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace from above and for our salvation let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For the peace of the whole world, for the well-being of the church of God, and for the unity of all let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

For this holy house and for all who offer here their worship and praise let us pray to the Lord.

Lord, have mercy.

Help, save, comfort and defend us, gracious Lord.

Amen.

THIS IS THE FEAST

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Worthy is Christ, the Lamb who was slain, whose blood set us free to be people of God.

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Power, riches, wisdom and strength, and honor, blessing, and glory are His.

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Sing with all the people of God, and join in the hymn of all creation.

Blessing, honor, glory, and might be to God and the Lamb forever. Amen.

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

For the Lamb who was slain has begun His reign. Alleluia.

This is the feast of victory for our God.

Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

THE PRAYER OF THE DAY

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Let us pray. O God,

You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

FIRST LESSON Acts 8:26-40

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. 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 and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. 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.
In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth."

And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. 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?" And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. 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. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

PSALM 150

Praise the LORD!
Praise God in his sanctuary;
praise him in his mighty heavens!
Praise him for his mighty deeds;
praise him according to his excellent greatness!
Praise him with trumpet sound;

praise him with lute and harp!
Praise him with tambourine and dance;
praise him with strings and pipe!
Praise him with sounding cymbals;
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
Let everything that has breath praise the LORD!
Praise the LORD!

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit;
as it was in the beginning,
is now, and will be forever. Amen.**

SECOND LESSON 1 John 4:1-11

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you heard was coming and now is in the world already. Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are from the world; therefore they speak from the world, and the world listens to them. We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us; whoever is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the Spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. 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. 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. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

CHILDREN'S SERMON

ALLELUIA VERSE

Alleluia.

Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life.

Alleluia, alleluia.

GOSPEL John 15:1-8

The Holy Gospel according to St. John the 15th chapter

Glory to You, O Lord.

[Jesus said:] "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 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. 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. 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. If you abide in

me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.”

This is the Gospel of the Lord.
Praise to You, O Christ.

SERMON

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen.
Dear friends in Christ:

When a man and woman fall in love and decide that they wish to live together within the bonds of holy marriage, it is good that they first seek some help and advice from others. Often this can be done by consulting with family members and friends, who can offer good feedback and share what they have experienced themselves. The church, too, is happy to help. In fact, we normally require sessions of pre-marital counseling to give that extra assistance.

Likewise, when a married couple decides to grow its family through a birth of a child or an adoption or the receiving of a foster child, it's also good for them to seek help and advice. Once again, family and friends are normally an excellent source for such help. But so are books, medical and health professionals, and the church. Family dynamics can be tricky. Good help is always needed.

In the Gospel lesson just read, Jesus is preparing his followers to be a family of faith – to live together, work together and be a mutual help and support to one another. He's been doing this preparing for a while now—teaching them, travelling with them and ministering together with them. But now he is doing it with a new urgency. For soon he will be leaving them.

Gathered there in the Upper Room, just before his betrayal and arrest, Jesus had already shared with them many important things. He had given a new command to love one another and illustrated it through the washing of their feet. He had also told them of his leaving; after which he quickly assured them that he would still be with them through the giving of the Holy Spirit.

Now that he has said these things, Jesus then turns to the subject of how his followers should live together under the Spirit's guidance. And he does this by using an illustration. In the family of faith, he is the vine, and his followers are the branches.

In using this imagery, Jesus builds on the language of the Old Testament prophets. They had spoken of Israel as the vineyard which the Lord God planted and tended. Jesus now uses that imagery to teach about important new things God was doing. Our sermon today will consider four points that Jesus certainly wanted them, and us, to hear.

First, Jesus is clearly urging his disciples to continue placing their faith in him. Jesus not only says “I am the vine,” but he also says: “I am the TRUE vine.” By saying this, Jesus is both claiming a continuity with the Old Testament faith and asserting himself as the way to go forward in this same faith. To put faith in him – his words, his ministry, his identity – is to be a faithful follower of the God who has been there from the beginning and who had promised to tend his people in new and powerful ways as was needed.

When the prophets used the metaphor of the vineyard, they would often use it to point out how Israel didn't follow the Lord's ways. Isaiah 5 tells how God: “built a watchtower in the midst of [the vineyard] and hewed out a wine vat in it; and he looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes [instead].” Isaiah then goes on to announce God's judgment on the vineyard, telling how God would remove its hedge so that it would be trampled; and how he would withhold the rain from it so that it would wither and die.

God, of course, would continue to be faithful to his vineyard. Even a total destruction as described here would be followed by a re-planting. And that's to Jesus' point. In him, God was doing something new. He was re-planting the vineyard. And he was doing it in a new and greater way.

When Jesus says: "I am the true vine," he is also giving us an additional sign of his claim. The words "I am" echo the phrase which God had famously used to describe himself when speaking to Moses through the burning bush. "I am who I am," God had said – giving us the name we know as Yahweh. Now here, centuries later, Jesus is referring to himself by the same name. Jesus, in fact, used this name seven times, with seven different images. Here at St. Paul's, we have those seven images made visible for us in the stained-glass windows encircling our sanctuary. "I am the vine" is right over there.

Beyond this claim of identity and purpose for himself, there is also a second lesson that Jesus certainly wants his disciples to catch in his words. As branches that are connected to the true vine, his disciples are to abide in him and bear fruit.

Abiding in him speaks to the connection we are to keep. We are to continue to think about what Jesus has told us and trust him as the one who nourishes us and keeps us strong. We're not to sever that connection. We're to acknowledge and appreciate Jesus as the source of our health and well-being.

Beyond this, however, we are also to bear fruit. And this means we are to do good works. We are to use our skills, abilities and energies for good purposes – those that further God's desires for everyone. We are to live out what God has intended for his people from the beginning, when he first told them to "be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28)." We are to bring forth and share what St. Paul called the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Eph. 5:22-23).

In speaking of this, Jesus points out that we will only be able to bear this fruit as we stay connected to him. Indeed, we "bear" the fruit, we don't produce it. Therefore, our first priority is to abide in the Lord through our attention and faith. "Abiding" is actually the only thing that God commands here. When we abide in him, we will then bear fruit.

Having said this, we should also note that the producing of good fruit is still of critical importance. God notices whether good fruit is being produced or not. And this is the third teaching we should glean from Jesus' words in this text.

Jesus tells us that every branch in him that does not bear fruit God will cut away and get rid of. Yes, this is a harsh word of judgment. But again, it's nothing new. God only puts up with so much evil. We know that. And God only puts up with so much unfaithfulness too. God has said these things from the beginning. Branches without fruit don't advance God's purposes, they inhibit them. Likewise, faith without works is dead.

As a family of faith, we are to remind one another of our fruit-bearing responsibility. And we are to foster the qualities of good fruit when we gather. This will mean first and foremost lifting up the words and example of Jesus. But it will also mean living out those words and example in our fellowship and service.

When we learn how to treat one another lovingly and respectfully in Sunday School, we will bring that learning to our other schools. When we learn to pursue a Godly mission in our church meetings, we will bring that learning to our work meetings. When we learn to forgive one another in our church life, we will bring that learning to the many other times in life where healing can only happen through forgiveness.

Every branch that does not bear fruit God takes away. We must hear that warning.

As well, we must also hear what God does to the branches which DO bear fruit. And this leads to our fourth and final point. Jesus said: “Every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit.”

Here we have a teaching that might be a little less easy to understand. What does it mean that God prunes us?

At first glance, it seems to imply that God does things to cut us back. That’s what pruning is. Branches get cut back. If branches get too big, the quality of the grapes suffer and their ability to produce will decline.

I suppose each of us does need to be cut back from time to time – having our pride lessened and our independence from God challenged. We sometimes get “too big for our britches” as the old saying goes. Perhaps God does need to allow some pain and failure to come our way now and then.

But this is not the main way we are to understand this teaching of Jesus. The point we are to see is that God works diligently in our lives to care for our soul. He does all that is necessary to encourage us in our faith, so that we would bring forth fruit that is good.

In the original language of the New Testament, the word for “pruning” is the same as the word for “cleaning.” This points to the greater purpose of Jesus’ words here. And in case we miss it, Jesus then goes on to use that very word in the next sentence, saying: “And already you are clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”

In the metaphor of pruning, Jesus is pointing to an application of something that has already been done. Just as Jesus cleansed his disciples from their sins through his word of grace – being

the very Word himself that was living among them and the one who would soon die for those sins – so also Jesus continues to cleanse his disciples as his words continue to be heard. This includes the hearing of his words of Law – those words which tell the disciples how to live clean and holy lives. And this includes the hearing of his words of Gospel – those words which announce to the repentant sinner their cleansing via the forgiveness of their sins.

You and I can think of our time right now as a time of pruning. We are hearing God’s words – those that move us to repentance and those that comfort us with God’s grace; those that remind us of the importance of right living and those that assure us of God’s help. When we receive the caring help of our Lord Jesus, we stay healthy ourselves and bear fruit for others.

How good it is to receive this help and care. And how good it is to receive it together – as branches connected to one another through Jesus Christ the true vine. After all, a grapevine is really a community — many individual branches interconnected and intertwined, but all designed for the sole purpose of bearing fruit.

May God then bless our community – our family of faith. And may God bless us individually, as branches in his vineyard attached to Christ the vine. When we abide in him, we will bear much fruit. May it be so, to his glory! Amen.

In the holy name of Jesus. Amen.

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| <p>1 At the Lamb's high feast we sing
Praise to our victorious King,
Who has washed us in the tide
Flowing from His pierced side.
Alleluia!</p> <p>2 Praise we Him, whose love divine
Gives His sacred blood for wine,
Gives His body for the feast—
Christ the victim, Christ the priest.
Alleluia!</p> <p>3 Where the paschal blood is poured,
Death's dread angel sheathes the sword;
Israel's hosts triumphant go
Through the wave that drowns the foe.
Alleluia!</p> <p>4 Praise we Christ, whose blood was shed,
Paschal victim, paschal bread;
With sincerity and love
Eat we manna from above.
Alleluia!</p> | <p>5 Mighty Victim from the sky,
Hell's fierce pow'rs beneath You lie;
You have conquered in the fight,
You have brought us life and light.
Alleluia!</p> <p>6 Now no more can death appall,
Now no more the grave enthrall;
You have opened paradise,
And Your saints in You shall rise.
Alleluia!</p> <p>7 Easter triumph, Easter joy!
This alone can sin destroy;
From sin's pow'r, Lord, set us free,
Newborn souls in You to be.
Alleluia!</p> <p>8 Father, who the crown shall give,
Savior, by whose death we live,
Spirit, guide through all our days:
Three in One, Your name we praise.
Alleluia!</p> |
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APOSTLES' CREED

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

OFFERING At the Lamb's High Feast Setting: Jacob B Weber

PRAYERS OF THE CHURCH

Let us pray for the whole Church of God in Christ Jesus and for all people according to their needs.

Heavenly Father, You have grafted us onto the vine of Your Son. Prune us and cut off from us all sin and dead works, that we may always draw life from Your Son and produce the fruits of faith and good works. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Lord God, Your only Son came in the flesh to bear our sin and be our Savior. Protect us from all false teaching and the spirit of the Antichrist, that we may always confess Christ to be our only true God and remain faithful to Him. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Father and Teacher of all truth, guide teachers and catechumens in Your Word, that they may increase in understanding, faith and love for Christ, the Lamb led to the slaughter in our place and risen from the dead. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Almighty God, give health and guidance to our president and all in authority, that they may serve honorably and in accord with Your good order. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Merciful God, You hear and answer Your children in their hour of need. [*Give aid to _____.*] Grant that they would bear their crosses with faith, ever looking to You, and so fix their hearts where true joy is found. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

O God, You are love and always reveal Your love through Your Son. Grant that all who come to Your feast of love may worthily eat of Christ's body and blood, so that whoever abides in this love forever abides in You, and You in him. Lord, in Your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

Heavenly Father, You are gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. Hear and answer our prayers for the sake of Jesus Christ, and Your saints shall bless You; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

THE 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.

BENEDICTION

The Lord bless us and keep us.

The Lord make His face shine on us
and be gracious to us.

The Lord look upon us with favor and ✠ give us peace.

SENDING HYMN #474 Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen

1 Alleluia!

Jesus is risen!

Trumpets resounding in glorious light!

Splendor, the Lamb,

Heaven forever!

Oh, what a miracle God has in sight!

Refrain

Refrain

Jesus is risen and we shall arise:

Give God the glory! Alleluia!

2 Walking the way,

Christ in the center

Telling the story to open our eyes;

Breaking our bread,

Giving us glory:

Jesus our blessing, our constant surprise.

Refrain

3 Jesus the vine,

We are the branches;

Life in the Spirit the fruit of the tree;

Heaven to earth,

Christ to the people,

Gift of the future now flowing to me.

Refrain

4 Weeping, be gone;

Sorrow, be silent:

Death put asunder, and Easter is bright.

Cherubim sing:

"O grave, be open!"

Clothe us in wonder, adorn us in light.

Refrain

**5 City of God,
Easter forever,
Golden Jerusalem, Jesus the Lamb,
River of life,
Saints and archangels,
Sing with creation to God the I AM! *Refrain***

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DISMISSAL

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

POSTLUDE Alleluia! Jesus Is Risen Setting: Harald Rohlig

Acknowledgments

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