

**Sermon: 2 May 2021; Easter 5; Philip and the Eunuch** Acts 8: 26-40; 1 Jn 4:7-21; John 15: 1-8

***May the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all our hearts, be now and always acceptable unto You, O Lord our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.***

Over the last few weeks I have attended and/or officiated a number of weddings with all the focus on “love” that you would expect. Yesterday we even had the classic reading from 1 Cor 13; *“love is patient, kind, etc.”* It’s uplifting to be a part of something so positive and after a long Christmas, Epiphany, Lent and Easter season, and with ANZAC Day thrown in for good measure, a little bit of uplifting has been lovely.

But in our readings today we see a different imperative. Perhaps our message today is less for those yet to be converted as it is for those of us already in the family; those of us at risk if we aren’t “living in” Jesus and bearing fruit. (Although we will take as many as come whenever they are ready).

The story of Philip and the Eunuch sits in between the stoning of Stephen, which was overseen and approved of by Saul, and Saul’s conversion on the road to Damascus. And it raises interesting questions about folk who are a little different from the norm ... about which Moses had been very specific in Deu 23: 1 ... *“no emasculated male (eunuch’s) shall be included in a Jewish religious community.”* But then the prophet Isaiah, the one being read by the Ethiopian in the chariot and talking to Philip about its meaning, reveals that eunuchs will be accepted by the God of boundless loving kindness; they can be given *“an everlasting name that will not be cut off ... he who gathers the exiles of Israel ... I will gather still others to them”* (Isa 56: 3-5).

John continues this theme in his first letter when he talks about *perfect love*: *“This is love ... not that we loved God, but that He loves us and sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.”* God is love. Whoever lives in love ... lives in God and God in him.

Therefore, we are to love one another as He loves us. *“His love is made complete in us.”*

Just think about that for a moment ... His love is *made complete* in us? God wants us to willingly participate in His completion! In applying our gift of free will in accordance with our new lives in Christ ... by loving others as He loves us ... we are participating in achieving perfection. I am not saying that God isn’t already perfect ... but by making a choice for Jesus we actually participate in achieving a state of perfection that did not previously exist. God’s presence becomes evident in *all those who love*.

The context for the gospel passage today is the Last Supper. Judas has left the table to betray Jesus to the authorities and Jesus is making His last impassioned statements to the remaining eleven just before they head down to the Garden to pray.

When John uses the term *indwelling* here, he is talking about a level of engagement much deeper than what we understand in worldly terms; He is talking about a divine standard ... the one to which we should be aspiring. *I am the True vine ... My Father is the Vine keeper ... I am the Vine ... you are the branches.* Jesus fulfils two different but complementary functions in this context; He provides the point of attachment for all the branches that proceed from Him, and He is the conduit for the essence of life to all of those who are attached to the vine. No branch can achieve its fruit production targets unless it is attached to the vine. No branch, even if it is attached that is not producing fruit is worth keeping ... it is cut off and burned in the fire. But on the other hand, there is a mutuality in this equation ... the vine remains incomplete without branches and without fruit ... it is imperfect. Hence Jesus’ encouragement of His disciples

in the next section: *“make your dwelling in my love ... this is My command that you love one another just as I have loved you.”* We each participate fully and actively in the process of in-dwelling through our baptism and by taking in/absorbing/living His Word.

I’ve made the point a few times recently that we are all works in progress and we all fall back from time to time. But here, Jesus is giving us a good example of how to live in Him ... we need to love one another as He loves us ... those easy to love and those we struggle to.

Jesus is using this metaphor in the same way He does others: reminding us that we are always and only ever required to live a life of complete dependence on Him. Remember what happened when Jesus called out to Peter and the others when they had gone fishing in John 21? Having made a fire for the BBQ on the beach, Jesus called out noting that they hadn’t caught anything all night ... “cast the net out the other side of the boat” ... and they hauled in so many that they were at risk of breaking the net.

Don’t forget though, that just living in Him doesn’t mean that we will always be aware of His presence at every moment. A piece of pottery needs to sit on a shelf at a distance from the potter to dry a bit before it gets a handle attached, and that same piece of pottery needs to be fired in a kiln in order to achieve its true purpose ... and we too will learn that only by living in faith and trusting that He has our best interests at heart ... can we surrender in love, become complete ... the way He always knew we could.

**Amen.**