

May 2, 2021
5th Sunday of Easter

“All Lives Matter/That’s Just Fruity”

Over the last several weeks as we have followed the impact of the resurrection on the disciples, I think we have seen a pretty clear resurrection foundation being laid. It's a very familiar progression. Jesus taught and modeled in ministry for three years. This His disciples saw and heard. However, on the night that He was arrested, they didn't seem to remember it all. They scattered, they denied Him, they hid out of fear for the Jews. But when He rose and appeared to them saying, ‘peace be with you,’ breathing on them and saying receive the Holy Spirit; the one who Jesus said would teach them all things, who would bring to their remembrance all that they had been taught and would give them the very words to speak. He then opened the scriptures to them showing how He had to fulfill all the law, all the prophets, and all the Psalms. And then He gave them a purpose. Go and make disciples, baptizing them, teaching them. What was the result? Well, the gospel that we heard this morning was fulfilled.

Let's go back to that gospel John 15 and another one of those great I AM's. Notice how Jesus starts it out. He says, “I am the *true* Vine.” And the minute hear that word true, it serves as a warning. There are false vines. It's much like I was watching an episode of “Pawn Stars” the other day, and Rick the owner was showing his son the difference between a true Rolex and a fake Rolex. Why did he need to do that? Because people would come into the shop with a Rolex watch and try to sell it for thousands of dollars. You had to know the difference. So, Jesus tells us something right away here, “I am the true Vine.” There are false vines out there.

What does He say about the true vine? Well, He says that there are branches and some of the branches don't bear fruit. Those are cut off. But others bear fruit. Those poor branches that bear fruit, they're going to be pruned. They are going to be cut since they bore fruit. You want to cut it, so that it branches out more and bears even more fruit. There's a

definite message here, besides the warning, it's a message that the true vine demands and expects fruit. Otherwise, it's cut off and burned. Now you might say, 'that was pretty harsh. Where's the love? Where's the grace? Where's the acceptance?' It is not at all harsh when you consider what Jesus says. He also says, "abide in me and I in you." Again, a very familiar theme that we have seen over and over. Jesus is with us. He is with us every step of the way. He comes to us through Holy Communion. Jesus is with us that makes a big difference.

Second, He makes it very clear that the branch cannot bear fruit by itself. So, He says, "abide in me, and I in you." If we abide, if we live in Jesus, he it is that bears much fruit because He is the one who does it. He makes that clear. "Apart from me you can do nothing." And by the way, again, think about the implications of that for the world. We hear a lot of, 'oh that was good man or that was good woman.' But apart from Jesus, you cannot do good. People will look at what you do and say, 'all that's good, but it's not good because it's not inspired by God. It's not to His glory.

And so, Jesus continues; "Abide in me and my words in you." Again, how important is scripture? Scripture is the foundation of our faith. But He tells us even more. 'If we abide in Him, if we abide in His words, not only will we bear much fruit, we also can come to Him in prayer and ask whatever we wish in His name, and in His will, and He is going to answer. He will hear that prayer and answer. With all of that, it's only right that He would expect fruit. It's only right that if someone says, 'I don't want that... 'I don't want you abiding in me. I don't want your word abiding in me. I don't want your power. I don't want the Holy Spirit. I don't want your teachings. I don't want to bear fruit.' that He would cut it off, throw it away, and burn it in the fire.

And so, we see in the book of Acts, beginning first, as we've seen with Peter and John and the lame man; we see them abiding in Christ, abiding in His words, and sharing his words. Abiding in prayer and bearing fruit; over 5000 men came to believe. With the growth comes growing pains and so two chapters later we see the disciples were increasing in number and there was a complaint. A complaint was made, well I guess we could say under the banner of "Greek lives matter."

Because the windows, they said were being neglected in the distribution. They were claiming Hebrew privilege. That the disciples, who were Hebrews, we're taking care of their windows first and that the Greek widows, the Gentile widows were getting served second and getting just the leftovers. What did the disciples say about it? "It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables." And so, they did something. Based on that word serve, the root word in Greek is diakonia. It's the word for a servant or literally deacon. It means one who serves. That term is again, not politically correct, in today's day and age because if you are one who serves, it means you have a master, and you do what that master says. Their master had said go and make disciples, baptizing and teaching. And so, they are saying this is what Jesus told us to do. We've grown, we can't oversee the daily ministries of the church and provide for all of it, so we need more deacons, servants. This is where the deacons were born. They chose seven men full of good repute, full of the Spirit and full of wisdom. God's word is considered wisdom. Again, we see the disciples, the apostles had learned very well from Jesus; and as a result, they taught very well. The result was that the Word of God continued to increase, and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem and a great many priests became obedient to the faith.

Why priests? The priests understood service. They were to serve their Lord and they also understood atonement. They were the ones who led the atoning sacrifices. It made sense to them now. Jesus, He fulfilled the prophecies, the law, the Psalm. He became our atoning sacrifice. We must serve Him, and we also see those deacons. They understood full well what they were supposed to do. They are to bear fruit, make disciples, baptize, and teach. We read in our New Testament reading this morning that Phillip, one of those seven deacons, was contacted by the Angel of the Lord, who said, 'rise and go toward the South to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' How would you like instructions like that? Rise, go down Kettleman Lane to I-5. How would you respond to that? Would you just go, or would you ask why? Notice, Phillip doesn't ask why. Even after the Angel of the Lord, for good measure puts in a little bit more of a challenge. 'This is a desert place.' In other words, there's nothing there. Phillip gets up and he goes. He is a servant, he does what his master says, no questions. Why? Master

said it, the Master is the purpose, I'll trust Him. He learned well; he was abiding in Christ. He was abiding in God's word. He was trusting. He had stayed. There is what abide really is.

What happens when he goes to this road? He comes upon an Ethiopian eunuch, the treasurer in the service of Candace the Queen of Ethiopia. He had come to Jerusalem to worship, which tells us he was a proselyte. He would have been allowed into the court of the Gentiles. He was now returning home in his chariot. So, the Lord tells Phillip, go to him and we read Philip ran. So, the chariot was moving. There are those who would claim here is a miracle of God. Just like he had made it so that Elijah could outrun King Ahab's chariot, Philip out runs the chariot of this Ethiopian eunuch, catches up to him, and he's not even out of breath. Here's this eunuch reading from Isaiah, which those of you in our Sunday morning Bible class know, it's not an easy book to read. And Philp goes, joins him, and asks him, 'What are you reading?' 'Do you understand it?' No, how can I understand it unless someone tells me? And Phillip tells him, "The One who was quiet, the One who was like a lamb being led to the slaughter, the One whose life was taken from Him, it's Jesus. You just left the temple, you just experienced giving a sacrifice for your sins. There is no more need. Jesus, the son of God died for you, took your sins on Him so that you might be saved. And as they are going, it just so happens in this desert place, they come to some water and the eunuch takes things into his own hands. See here is some water! What prevents me from being baptized? The overwhelming answer is nothing. And so, Phillip baptizes him.

I would like you to think about what we have seen so far in the book of Acts. Peter preaches to the people in Jerusalem who had killed Jesus. We saw that Hebrew lives matter. Peter then preaches to the religious leaders who were responsible for killing Jesus, antagonist lives matter. Now we see that they addressed the concern of the Greeks, whose widows weren't being taking care of as well as they thought they should be, claiming Hebrew privilege. The Apostles message; Greek lives matter. This Ethiopian eunuch almost certainly was a black man. God said to Phillip the Ethiopian lives matter.

So, I'd like you to think about the title of the sermon, All Lives Matter. There are those who claim that is an improper statement in this day and age; that it is offensive. But yet it is a core foundation of the Easter message. Jesus died for all. All lives matter and that is what makes it as the rest of the title says: That's Just Fruity. Because if we abide in Christ, we are to bear much fruit. How do we bear much fruit? By loving all mankind. By serving, becoming that deacon, the servant of Jesus and taking His message, his purpose to baptize and teach to the Hebrew, to the Antagonist, to the Greek, to the Ethiopian, to all the world. Phillip had learned well, he bore fruit. May it be said of us, that we are downright fruity the congregation.

In our Saviors Name, Amen.