**Notes for Next Sunday**

Fifth Sunday of Easter

**The Point of this Week’s Readings**

Each of the readings in one way or another has a touch of praising God either by word or by deed.

The Psalm (Psalm 150) urges the praising of God through the various musical instruments available when this psalm was written. This is the fifth of five Hallelujah (began with Psalm 146) Psalms that conclude the Book of Psalms. In its brief scope it tells us where the Lord should be praised, why he should be praised, how he should be praised, and who should praise him.

The First Reading (Acts 8:26-40) is about Philip being sent by God to help an Ethiopian understand the Scriptures he was reading. Philip had been elected a deacon in Acts 6. Philip offers his thanks to God by serving where God wants him to minister which in this case is explaining a reading from Isaiah. After Philip is done with the Ethiopian, the Lord takes him to yet another place (Azotus) to share the Gospel.

The Epistle (1 John 4:1-21) speaks first of testing the spirits that would lead us away from our Lord (vv. 1-6). THEN, the rest of verses are spent in reminding the readers how much God loves them and how they are to show their appreciation in loving those around them.

The Gospel (John 15:1-8), is about us as “branches.” We are to stay connected to The Vine (Jesus). Without Jesus (The Vine) we can do nothing and are only going to wither and be thrown into the fire. However, this text speaks of the branches (us) bearing much fruit. This is to God’s glory and gives proof that we are His disciples.

*For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.*

**Psalm 150**

1﻿ **Praise the LORD.﻿ Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty heavens. ﻿2﻿ Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. ﻿3﻿ Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre, ﻿4﻿ praise him with tambourine and dancing, praise him with the strings and flute, ﻿5﻿ praise him with the clash of cymbals, praise him with resounding cymbals. ﻿6﻿ Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD.**

The following are some insights to individual verses…

The instruments listed here are given English names for ancient equivalents. Most have been identified through archaeological research. They probably did not have modern tuning capabilities that would allow them to accompany singing, so they surely would sound like a “joyful noise.” (TLSB)

A tenfold “hallelujah!” in the heavens and in the place of worship, with every musical instrument; everything that breathes should praise the Lord because of His mighty deeds and His “excellent greatness”! Of the many reasons to praise God, for us the most joyous are “His mighty deeds” (v 2) by which He has redeemed us in Christ and brought us to faith. • O Lord, may the praises in the Psalms, the praises in the Church, and the praises in heaven equip me to join in praising You! Amen. (TLSB)

**First Reading – Acts 8:26-40**

**26﻿ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ﻿27﻿ 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, ﻿28﻿ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. ﻿29﻿ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.” ﻿30﻿ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. ﻿31﻿ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ﻿32﻿ 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. ﻿33﻿ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.”﻿ ﻿34﻿ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ﻿35﻿ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. ﻿36﻿ 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?” ﻿38﻿ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ﻿39﻿ 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. ﻿40﻿ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.**

The following are some insights to individual verses…

The Gospel is spreading—from Jerusalem to Samaria to Africa (through the Ethiopian), and then, in subsequent chapters, to Saul (and we know what happens through him!) and Cornelius. From Samaritan to persecutor to centurion to eunuch, the Gospel spreads not only to nations but also to people who previously had been shut out of a place among God’s people. The death and resurrection of Christ means that all barriers to a life with God are broken down. Forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with God, and a share of his Spirit are God’s gifts to everyone. “What is to prevent my being baptized?” asks the eunuch (v 36 RSV). Nothing at all!

*8:27 an Ethiopian.* The Ethiopian was not from the area we know as Ethiopia today. “Ethiopian” simple means that he was a black man. He was from the kingdom of Nubia, which was located on the upper Nile River between Aswan (in modern Egypt) and Khartoum (in the Sudan).

*8:27 eunuch*. It was not uncommon for castrated males to hold positions of importance in oriental courts. It seems certain that Luke intends us to see this man as sexually mutilated. Such a condition precluded full participation in the assembly. The eunuch may be marginal within the Pharisaic definition of the people of God, but he is a mighty person in his own land (over all the queen’s treasury!). His chariot is capacious enough for himself and the scrolls and a guest. He speaks elegant Greek. He has a driver. Whoever the “historical Ethiopian” might have been, therefore, Luke clearly wants his readers to see him as a part of the “ingathering of the scattered people” of Israel.

*8;30 reading* … *Isaiah*. A man of considerable means (affording a large scroll) and education. (TLSB)

*8:30-33* Philip seizes the moment. One could hardly have asked for a more appropriate biblical text for the two men’s consideration. It helps that the eunuch is keen to understand the message of the Word. Remember, however, the role his own self-interest has played. He has a personal reason to want to understand; the Law is driving him to the cross (something he doesn’t understand quite yet).

*8:37 What prevents me from being baptized?* Understanding what God has done for him in Christ, the eunuch is determined to receive the gifts of God. There is an urgency to the proclamation and promise of salvation that will admit no delay.

**Epistle – 1 John 4:1-21**

**Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.  2 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,  3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. 4 You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.  5 They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them.  6 We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.**

The following are some insights to individual verses…

*4:1 spirit.* Satan tried to stop Jesus but could not; now he is after those to whom Jesus would give eternal life. There is no neutral ground, and no mortal human being is independent – one either believes in and belongs to the Spirit of God or one believes in and belongs to Satan and speaks accordingly. (TLSB)

*4:1 test the spirits.* This means an examination of words and actions in light of the whole testimony of Scriptures. Luther: “The emphasis is on the words ‘test the spirits,’ for with these words he touches their boasting as with a needle. If it is as if he were saying ‘Those who boast of the Spirit will come to you. But test the spirits.” (TLSB)

**7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.  8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.  9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.  10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.  11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.  12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 13 We know that we live in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.  14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.  15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God.  16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him.  17 In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him.  18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 19 We love because he first loved us.  20 If anyone says, “I love God,” yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.  21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.**

The following are some insights to individual verses…

The word “love” in its various forms is used 43 times in the letter, 32 times in this short section. (CSB)

*4:7-8*The little Greek word *ek* in v 7 identifies the source of love: God. He is the giver of love and the one who shows us what unconditional love is all about.

*4:7 born of God.* Only God can make Christians (cf. Jn. 1:12-13). One way this happens is through Baptism. Another way is through the preaching of the Word of Christ. (TLSB)

*4:11 love one another.* – God Himself has made the beginning with love, with love toward us and has set the pattern for our love toward others. At the same time He has obligated us to thank Him and to return such love toward our brothers. So the Apostle uses God’s own deed of love toward us as a most potent means to make his exhortation effective.

*4:13-21* One of the characteristics of John’s writings is the repetition of key words to develop theological themes. John builds on what he has said earlier, reinforcing the themes while rising to a higher plane. The flow of his discourse is like a rising spiral.

*4:18 no fear in love.* Love is the work and will of God and the fruit of faith in God for the salvation of every human. In this, there is no fear. (TLSB)

*4:18 perfect love.* Jesus is God’s perfect love that has come to seek and to save, not to condemn. In Christ, God’s love reaches its goal, i.e., love is perfected in us when we believe in Jesus and no longer fear that God might still be angry with us because of our sin. (TLSB)

**Gospel – John 15:1-8**

**“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ﻿2﻿ He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes﻿a﻿ so that it will be even more fruitful. ﻿3﻿ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ﻿4﻿ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ﻿5﻿ “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. ﻿6﻿ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ﻿7﻿ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ﻿8﻿ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.**

The following are some insights to individual verses…

*15:1 I am.* Note emphatic "I am," right at the beginning. Forms of emphatic "I am" occur again in verse 4, twice in verse 5. In addition to the other obvious references, Christ refers to Himself no less than 14 times. Likewise, notice the obvious references to  "you," a total of fourteen. It's one of the very personal "I-you" passages in the Gospel of John. (Buls)

*15:1 the true vine.* The vine is frequently used in the OT as a symbol of Israel (e.g., Ps 80:8–16; Isa 5:1–7; Jer 2:21). When this imagery is used, Israel is often shown as lacking in some way. Jesus, however, is “the true vine.” (CSB)

*15:2 bears no fruit*. This does not mean that some Christians are actually fruitless, but indicates the deluded person who thinks he can be a Christian but produces no fruit. (Buls)

*15:2 prunes.* Literally, “cleanses” (cf. v. 3). Although Christians have already been cleansed by God’s forgiveness, they are daily in need of repentance and spiritual growth. (TLSB)

*15:3 clean.* The point of the verse here is that the fruit, the good works, do not make a Christian better or cleaner. Christians are already clean, justified, pure because of the Gospel. Whenever Christians feel their sinfulness and sin they must flee to the Gospel which conveys to them the forgiveness of sin because of what Christ suffered on the cross. The good works which a Christian does, though necessary and given to him by God (Ephesians 2:9.10), do not make the Christian better. (Buls)

*15:4 Remain in me.* "Remain" is another key word in this text. It occurs three times in this verse, once in 5, once in 6 and twice in 7, for a total of seven. Here "remain" is imperative. A person remains in Christ by faith. "And I will remain" means "and thus I will remain in you." Christ is telling us to remain in Him but He is not telling Himself to remain in us. He is assuring the individual believer that so long as he trusts in Christ he is cleansed and forgiven. That's always the starting point. (Buls)

*15:6 thrown into the fire and burned.* Judged. “Thrown” describes that which customarily happens. The stark law of this verse reminds us that Jesus, more than any other biblical personality, speaks of hell.

17:7*ask whatever you wish.* It means for us to remain in Christ and for His words to remain in us. Ridiculous or godless requests—which faith, relying on his words, would not make anyway—are not included in the promise.