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**Sunday, May 2, 2021**

**This short act of worship has been prepared for you to spend a few moments with God, knowing that other people are sharing this act of worship with you. This can be done alone or as a family. Young children can be invited to draw their prayers, share their thoughts, draw what they imagine from the readings, etc. Blessings!**

**Opening Prayer**

“Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord” (Psalm 150: 6)

**Hymn: There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy (UMH 121)**

Sing/ Read /pray /proclaim the words

There’s a wideness in God’s mercy,  
Like the wideness of the sea;  
There’s a kindness in His justice,  
Which is more than liberty.

There is welcome for the sinner,  
And more graces for the good;  
There is mercy with the Savior;  
There is healing in His blood.

For the love of God is broader  
Than the measure of our mind;  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.

If our love were but more simple,  
We should rest upon God’s word;  
And our lives would be illuminated  
By the presence of our Lord.

*Frederick W Faber 1854)*

Let us pray together

**Read Psalm 150, followed by these prayers of adoration and confession**

Loving God, we give you thanks and praise for the works of your creation in all its wonder and richness of diversity, a window for us to see who you are. Majestic, awe-inspiring, beyond understanding, the source of being.

We wonder at you, as we wonder at your world. We especially give you praise and thanks for your son, Jesus. We wonder at how you revealed yourself in him and went through the agony of death on the cross that we can know you. We wonder also at the many talents and different characteristics that you have bestowed on each of us today through your Spirit, which lead to acts of amazing creativity and kindness. You have shown us how there can be such strength in both togetherness and diversity, just as there is within the Trinity. Forgive us then when we fail to use the gifts you have given us, when we deny those talents in others and prevent them becoming the people you intended, when we fail to work together with others to achieve your purposes. Help us to know the freedom of forgiveness and to be open channels of your love and grace to others. Amen

**Read Psalm 150 again, this time out loud with rising gusto if you can!**

**Today’s Gospel Reading:** John 15: 1-8

**Today’s New Testament Reading:** Acts 8:26-39

**Time to Reflect**

Pruning and cutting back is essential to the process of growth. Particularly to fruit bearing plants like the vine. Jesus knew it, hence the wonderful image of John 15: 1-8.

In the Old Testament the vine is a symbol of Israel, but it is usually mentioned in the context of having been allowed to run wild, for example in Isaiah 5. Vines in the Middle

East were (and still are) fast growing and if left unchecked would grow in all directions, with lots of branches, meaning that the fruit bearing branches produced lots of small, poor quality fruit. Quite simply, to produce a good crop, there needed to be regular ruthless pruning, particularly in its early years. Jesus says that he is the true vine, the true Israel if you like and he exhorts his disciples to abide in him, to allow God who is the gardener to prune back those useless and tangled branches, so that good fruit will be produced.

How might God be pruning me through this season of pandemic? What is essential, what leads to good fruit? What is not needed or obstructs fullness of life?

In Acts 8:26-40, Philip follows the prodding of an angel, then the Holy Spirit, and has an encounter with someone who in his pre-follower of Jesus life, would not have sought to spend time with.

The Ethiopian eunuch is someone that a male Israelite like Philip would have had probably not normally considered appropriate company. There is the difference of ethnicity, compounded by how this person is actually a “government official” so to speak of another nation. He has been to worship at the temple in Jerusalem so he may be a proselyte to Judaism, but because of being a foreigner as well as castrated, he would have had to stay in the outer chambers of the temple and would not have been welcome with the Israelite men.

While it may be quite a stretch to equate a eunuch with a trans person today, nevertheless a eunuch operated in and was considered to be an in-between gender category. So after hearing all about Jesus from Philip, he asks- with this Jesus movement, will you accept me? Or prevent me from being baptized and joining the disciples? Do I still have to watch from the outside?

Philip said yes to the Holy Spirit when it directed him along the road, when it had him

get in the chariot, and when he baptized the Ethiopian eunuch. There is no longer any reason to think that some are more acceptable than others, in the Jesus movement we are all welcomed and all welcomed to abide, be pruned, and produce good fruit.

Take a time to sit quietly

### **Prayers of concern**

Loving, Lord God, help each of us to abide in you and produce fruit, not any old fruit, but the best fruit we can. Prune us back, remove those areas of our lives that get in the way of each other and help us to concentrate on the things you have truly called us to do. Help us to realize the gifts you have given us and how best to use them for your Kingdom.

Loving, Lord God may your Church be a window to you, that the world may see your love for all people in action. Bring an end to bickering, nit-picking and in-fighting. Unite your Church, give it a voice to challenge injustice and act with kindness. Make it a safe space, where people can reach their potential and work together. Help it to grow in love and produce rich fruit in abundance.

Loving, Lord God, we bring our world and local communities to you. So much conflict, hurt and suffering. We think of those mourning loved ones, those who feel isolated and cut off from family and friends due to the pandemic, those who live in fear for whatever reason. Bring the fruit of healing and peace to their place of need and instill in us a desire to be the answer to that prayer today. Amen.

Let us say now the words of The Lord’s Prayer in whatever language or version preferred.

### **The Lord’s Prayer**

*Our Father .....*

**Hymn:** Baptized in Water TFWS 2248 or sing another hymn that comes to mind.

Baptized in water,  
sealed by the Spirit  
cleansed by the blood of Christ our king;  
heirs of salvation,  
trusting his promise -  
faithfully now God's praises we sing.

Baptized in water,  
sealed by the Spirit,  
dead in the tomb with Christ our king;  
one with his rising,  
freed and forgiven  
thankfully now God's praises we sing.

Baptized in water,  
sealed by the Spirit,  
marked with the sign of Christ our king;  
born of one Father,  
we are his children -  
joyfully now God's praises we sing.

### Blessing

May the Lord bless you and make his face to shine upon you; may he water you with his love, that you grow in him and bless others with rich fruitful lives. Amen.

Original Materials by [John Hay](#) and [Rev. Michelle Magee](#)

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### John 15: 1-8

'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 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. 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. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My

Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

### Acts 8:26-39

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian[a] eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading: "He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 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.