

Sunday 3rd May 2015 Cathedral, Grahamstown 7.30 & 9.30 a.m.		Easter 4 – Year B Fifth Sunday of Easter
Acts 8:26-40	Ps 22:25-32	1 John 4:7-21
		John 15:1-8
LOVE ONE ANOTHER		

“My dear friends, let us love one another, because the source of love is God. Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but the unloving know nothing of God, for God is love.” (1 John 4:7)

Eastertide... our readings

We are in the Fifty Great Days of Easter: these weeks from Easter Day until Pentecost, during which we celebrate the reality that Jesus has risen, that the Risen Christ is amongst us, that Jesus has won the victory over sin and evil and death. On Easter Day we read the Gospel account of the resurrection. The disciples came to the tomb and found it empty, and some on that first Easter Day met the Risen Christ.

But the resurrection is not simply something that happened then. Sunday by Sunday, during these Fifty Great Days, our scripture readings help us to appreciate and grasp the different ways in which the Risen Christ meets with us now.

Let’s remind ourselves of our journey through Eastertide so far.

The Gospel readings for the first three Sundays of Easter bring us encounters between the Risen Lord and those who knew him. Mary Magdalene and Jesus in the garden; Thomas the apostle, who at first refuses to believe, but then sees and touches the wounds of Christ and responds with faith and trust – “My Lord and my God”; the Emmaus Road encounter when the disciples recognise Jesus as he breaks the bread, and as they share a meal together.

Last Sunday was the picture of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, who lays down his life for the sheep – his ongoing presence with us, his ministry to us as our shepherd, the one who leads and guides us.

Our scripture readings today give us three quite different aspects of the Christian life: Acts, the life and growth of the early church with the story of Philip and the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch; 1 John, reflections on the risen life and the nature of God; the Gospel reading from John which presents Jesus as the living vine, and we as the living branches, branches who are to be pruned so that we may bear fruit, fruit that will last.

We are reminded that like the branch of a vine, we need to remain connected with the vine itself, connected with our roots, if we are to stay alive, and bear fruit. “Remain in me, abide in me, live in me, remain united with me...” and you will bear much fruit: “apart from me you can do nothing.” (Jn 15:4-5)

What does it mean to remain connected with the vine? To remain, to live in Jesus? To be united with Jesus?

It means to put our roots down, to make our home in Jesus, to become one with the Lord. To belong.

When I was about eight years old, we as a family moved from Pietermaritzburg to Stellenbosch. I have very few memories of Pietermaritzburg, but I have many memories of Stellenbosch and the home that my parents built there – our life, the small farm, our sheep, the ups and downs of family life, our joys and sorrows. For me, Stellenbosch is my home town, the place that shaped me, because we lived there for all those years. I count myself as coming from Stellenbosch, because we made our home there. We belonged there.

To live in Jesus, to make our home in Jesus, is to belong to the Lord. It is to live in the heart of God; to be shaped and transformed by his love. It is in Jesus that we live and move and have our being.

The source of love is God

To live in Jesus is to be close to the heart of God – to be close to the source of love (1 Jn 4:7). I remember as a student going for a hike in the Cedarberg, climbing one of the mountains there – and discovering, near the top of the mountain, a tiny stream of water – clear, ice cold, refreshing beyond words, utterly clean, beautiful, life-giving – the source, the beginning, of the river that we could see in the valley far below us. To be close to the source is to be close to where it all begins. The heart. The origin.

To live in Jesus is to be close to where all love, all life, begins.

To live in Jesus is to draw close to the Lord in worship, in adoration, in prayer.

To live in Jesus is to be united with Jesus through Baptism.

To live in Jesus is to be fed and strengthened by his body and blood in the sacrament of the Eucharist; it is to be united in spirit and heart and soul with the Lord.

To live in Jesus is to offer all that we are to God; to open our lives, our hearts, so that God may dwell – live – in us.

To live in Jesus means that he is Lord of our lives.

To live in Jesus is to rest in the Lord, to speak with him, to look to the Lord day by day for strength and wisdom and courage and help.

To live in Jesus is to live in love – so wonderfully underlined in our 2nd reading, 1 John. “God is love; he who dwells in love is dwelling in God, and God in him.” (1 Jn 4:16b)

Love one another

I am constantly amazed at how the readings that the church gives us, Sunday by Sunday, speak into our reality, into what we are facing, into what we are going through. And especially so, today.

Following the recent xenophobic attacks, the defacing and removal of statues, and all that has been happening in our country over the last few weeks, our Bishop has asked us as the diocese to dedicate today, this 1st Sunday in May as a prayer day for an end to xenophobia¹.

We are called to “create an environment of love, peace, mercy and compassion”².

How do we do this? By remaining connected with the vine, with Jesus – by living in him (our Gospel reading); by living in love – and by loving one another. Why? Because “everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God.” (1 Jn 4:7b)

“Let us love one another”. (1 Jn 4:7a)

“God is love” – and he showed his love by sending his only Son into the world, giving of himself “so that we might have life through him”, sending his son “as a sacrifice to atone for our sins (1 Jn 4:9b, 10).

“If God thus loved us, my dear friends, we also must love one another..... if we love one another, he himself dwells in us...” (1 Jn 4:11-12)

There is no room for hatred of our brothers or sisters; no room for xenophobia; no room for bullying or abuse, no room for violence or cruelty; no room for attacks on one another; no room for rudeness; no

¹ *Pastoral Letter from the Bishop of Grahamstown in the wake of the current suffering and pain of our African brothers.* 23rd April 2015

² *Letter from the Bishop of Grahamstown to Archdeacons, Rectors, Priests in charge and Churchwardens,* 24th April 2015

room for aggression, no room for exclusion. Instead, as people who love, let us show courtesy and respect. Let us show our love.

As much as these past few weeks have been dreadful ones in many parts of our country, they have also been for us weeks of great hope, with so many signs of love. Where we see love, we see the presence of God.

This past week, the Cathedral Parish Council affirmed on behalf of us all as the Cathedral, our love and support for the Vice Chancellor of Rhodes University, Dr Sizwe Mabizela. It was my privilege to meet with him on Thursday and to convey this message to him, and to assure him of our prayers. It has also been good to hear, from various sources, that the astonishing recent attack on the VC, by Mr Zizi Kodwa of the ANC³, does not represent the voice of the ANC. Let's continue to hold the VC, and those around him, in our prayers. In our support for democracy and good governance, we as the Cathedral are a sign of Christ.

When we come here to worship at the Cathedral, and gather as the Cathedral family, we are a wonderful picture of the love of God, brought together, diverse and from all over – languages, backgrounds, age, race – all the things that can divide us – and yet we are here together. Do we realise how special this is? When we struggle to get our tongues round the various languages we are using in the liturgy, do we realise that our struggles and our efforts to embrace one another are a sign of the love of God?

When the Cathedral family, a few weeks back, opened their doors and homes and hosted student leaders with the Ansoc regional conference, and made the whole thing possible – do we realise how special that was? It was a sign of the love of God, a sign of the risen Christ.

³ *Grocotts Mail*, 24th April 2015

I am immensely thankful to many of you for your support and prayers for me and my family as we went through the recent Elective Assembly – and I am very content with the outcome. Charles May will be excellent in the Highveld diocese; and I think that my time, our time as the deanery family, with Claire, Rachel, Nicola, here in Grahamstown, is not yet over. As Rachel said, when she returned to Grahamstown after her gap year, “I realised just how much Grahamstown meant to me – finally found a home – and it struck me that I’d literally only started to love it when I returned from the UK. Strange how that happens. It’s taken me a good seven years.” This Cathedral community has become for me and my family a sign of the love of God, an experience of the Risen Christ.

So let’s celebrate what we have and who we are as the Cathedral, as the community of Grahamstown. Let us be conscious of relationships. Let us listen to one another. Let’s be open to the nudge, the prompting of the Holy Spirit to reach out, interact across the barriers – as Philip did when he went over to the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch, in our reading from the book of Acts.

CONCLUSION

Let us not despair. Let us not give up hope. Instead, let’s live in love. Let’s build what we have here, at the Cathedral, here in Grahamstown, here in our country. There are so many signs of love, so many signs of the presence of God all around us. Let us be signs of the risen Christ.