

5th Sunday of Easter

Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 150; 1 John 4:1-21

April 28, 2024 (written & preached by Nick Adams)

John 15:1-8

SUPPRISE! GOD LOVES US!

That is a take on the title of a book by C.S. Lewis entitled "Surprised by Joy" in which he discovers the joy of God's Love. Today's second lesson is two-fold, warning against false prophets and giving us the means to determine the difference between good and evil ones. Contrary to what we might think a prophet does not predict the future. He is regarded as an inspired teacher, or proclaimer of God. John explains that, to distinguish between the two, is do they preach the living Jesus in the flesh as the Son of God? If no, walk away.

A few years ago, I attended a conference in which the key note speakers were two theologians, one Catholic and one Lutheran. They discussed the problem on how do you tell which practice is the right one, which commands of the church to obey. The last word came from the Lutheran Pastor: "Ask yourself, did the command come from man or from God in scripture?" That is what John is asking us to do. Is what the prophet is saying from God or from himself?

Let's get back to John's declaration that God is love. We have, all of us, experienced this in our lives. He sent His Son to give up His life to redeem us from our sins. We are instructed by Him to love one another. That means everyone, not just those special to us. You might say that in today's world that is going to be very difficult. I say that today's world is no different than in Jesus' time, just more of it because there are more people. The old saying "there is nothing new under the sun" still holds today.

God's love for us is the only reason mankind is here today. He had plenty of reasons to start over if He wanted, but He did not. We are charged to love one another. That means to do all we can to spread the Gospel and help those we love to come home to God. There are additional texts with this lesson which is

vs12-21. It tells us that if we love one another, God abides within us and His love is perfected in us.

Our first lesson from Acts tells the story of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. After reading the passage in Isaiah he asked Philip to help him understand it. Upon learning the story of Jesus and hearing Philip's account of Jesus' life, he wished to be Baptized. When he was, he was filled with the Spirit and went away rejoicing with the Love of Jesus. This story tells us that we all should seek help to understand the scriptures and to encourage each other to live a life in Christ.

The third lesson is about vines, branches, and pruning. The vine is Jesus and the branches are us, the followers of Him. The Father is the pruner. He has made Jesus into the perfect vine in order to produce the best branches - us. The vine is pruned regularly to produce the best fruit. Those up to standards are kept. The rest are cut off and put into the fire. So, it is with us - those of us who abide in Christ - who are kept. Those who do not are tossed into the fire. Love is the key. If we love Jesus, we abide in Him who abides in the Father. Thus rests our salvation.