

**May 2, 2021, FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EASTER, SUNDAY SERVICE & SERMON
Pastor Tom Olson; Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran Church**

PRELUDE: Ray Holmberg (Osthus singers)

CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 150

HYMN #171 (AH) "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" 9 AM: #45 (OVH) "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

CONFESSION OF SIN: *Psalm 51:1-7 Have mercy on me. O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.*

CHILDREN'S SERMON:

FIRST LESSON: 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.

EPISTLE LESSON: *1 John 4:1-12 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. 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.*

READER: Here ends the reading of God's Word.

CONGREGATION SINGS: God be praised, for His glad Tidings!

CONFESSION OF FAITH: *I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, And of all things visible and invisible.*

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made; Who for us, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, And was made man; And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, He suffered and was buried; And the third day He rose again according to the Scriptures, And ascended into heaven, And is seated on the right hand of the Father, And He shall come again with glory to judge both the living and the dead; Whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Spirit, The Lord and Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father and the Son, Who with the Father and the Son together is worshiped and glorified, Who spoke by the Prophets. And I believe one holy Christian and apostolic Church, I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins. And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the Life of the world to come. Amen

GLORIA PATRI: Ambassador Hymnal p. 4 (please put on screen) *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost; As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen, Amen.*

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER FOR OFFERING

HYMN #265 “They Word, O Lord, like Gentle Dews”

**SERMON TITLE: “CONNECTED & FOCUSED”
John 15:1-8; Pastor Tom Olson; May 2, 2021**

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

PIPES: This spring I have been a pipe fitter on my steam engine. The state inspector is having me remove almost all of the old pipes and valves and replace them with new ones that are extra strong. Some of the old pipes were literally blocked, almost sealed shut, with rust and mineral build up. The engine simply could not have worked properly with such poor connection to the water tanks and steam pressure. It is important as I put the pipes back together that we not have too many devices trying to operate on the same pipe. We have to get the steam to where it is needed and not waste it on unnecessary tasks or leaks.

PRUNING: The same is true of our spiritual lives. We need good connections with the Lord that are unhindered and God wants to eliminate anything in our lives that is bleeding off important Holy Spirit power so that we can focus on bearing good fruit that lasts. This is exactly what we do with our apple trees, grape vines and tomato plants...we cut off the extra foliage and channel the nutrients into producing fruit and not just leaves and vines.

Let's look at this very important passage of Scripture in light of our CONNECTION to the Lord and the FOCUS of God's energy in our lives...CONNECTED AND FOCUSED...

I. UNHINDERED: A GOOD CONNECTION

John 15:1-4 "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 prunes 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.

ABIDE: There is no question that most of our issues would be solved if our relationship with the Lord was deeper. This goes for any relationship such as marriage or parenting or employer and employee. A good

connection of communication and emotional empathy will resolve most any issue that challenges the relationship. Bosses who take the time to get down on the factory floor or in the construction site and talk with the workers, listen to their concerns and encourage them have far fewer problems than those who stay in the office building and never get to know the workers by name. When parents have trouble with a child the first question I have for them is this, “How much time do you spend with your child...playing, talking, listening, working together? Jesus grew close to his disciples by spending time with them, walking, eating, ministering, talking... **James 4:8 “Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.”**

CLOSE: Last week we heard how the Shepherd deals with the repeatedly rebellious lamb. He breaks the leg so it can't run away and then carries the animal on his shoulders until the leg heals. By that time there is a tight personal bond of shepherd and lamb and the animal now desires to stay near to the shepherd. There are times that God needs to “break our leg” to get us to stay close to Him and develop an intimate relationship. **Jeremiah 29:13 ...you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.**

PIMARY: God makes it clear in this great passage of Scripture that drawing close to him on a regular basis is of primary importance if we want our life to produce fruit for His glory. He wants our lives to count with things of value for eternity. I am finding a good place to draw near to God is in the car...I leave for an appointment half hour early and then sit in a parking lot where I don't have any distractions.

BETHANY: Sharon and I are reading the history of Bethany Fellowship in Minneapolis. They were a group of believers from two Lutheran churches in South Minneapolis who had a desire to have their lives count for all eternity. They got a vision to send 100 missionaries out into the world. They have far surpassed that because they bought a farm in Bloomington in about 1950 and started a school for training missionaries. Sharon is a graduate of that school and one of the hundreds of missionaries that have gone into the world from that vision to bear fruit. And one of the points of the focus of the school has been the cross of Christ and the deeper spiritual life. It could be summarized by the old song, “Jesus keep me near the cross, there a precious fountain, Free to all—a healing stream, Flows from Calv'ry's mountain.” Pastor Hegre from Bethany was touched by God at a Lutheran Evangelistic Movement “Deeper Life” Camp at Medicine Lake near our AFLC schools.

BGEA: Billy Graham stayed near the cross and he bore much good fruit in his lifetime. At communion today, God draws us close to the cross and we are reminded of what is important...**UNHINDERED: A GOOD CONNECTION.**

II. UNDIVIDED: A FOCUSED PURPOSE

John 15:5-8 "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.

DISSIPATION: There are times in life where we get spread too thin and lose our focus. We need to set some projects or relationships aside so that we can do a better job with fewer things. I have friends who have had too much money and have kept buying more and more projects and never got any of them finished. There is nothing wrong with having interests, but we have to always watch for “dissipation” or shall we call it being “pulled in too many directions.” I have really wanted to belong to an antique tractor club but I have felt I have to let it go until after I am retired. Just a few rehearsals and concerts from the community band is all I can handle outside the church responsibilities I have without feeling overwhelmed. My focus right now has to be on the spiritual growth of church members. We each need to work on some community contact.” Don't be

surprised if God cuts out some things from your life. He is only helping you to focus and bear better fruit that lasts.

AGE: It hurts to have the unfruitful branches cut away and burned up but in the long run it feels really good to focus on less and do it better. As we get older, many things get taken away from us. But it forces us to deal with what is really important...our relationship with the Lord and loved ones.

PETERSON: James Asp was the pastor of the Agrimson family in Peterson, Minnesota. Pastor Asp once told us the story about a farm family that never had time to allow him to come and talk and pray with them about spiritual matters. However, their son was changing the tire on a fully loaded farm wagon and the jack slipped out and the wagon crushed him to death. He said that once that happened, they finally wanted him to come and talk to them about their souls, they now had all the time in the world, but it was too late for the son. They now wanted to focus on what was eternally important.

COMMUNION: As we come together for Holy Communion today it is a good time to renew CONNECTION and FOCUS. It is time for the old pipes plugged with sin to be opened up by the power of God's forgiveness and Holy Spirit. It is time to let go of activities and relationships that are wearing us out and preventing us from bearing fruit that counts for eternity. It is time to drink deeply of the grace that God will bring to us through Christ our sin bearer who as the innocent Son of God went to the cross and paid the price for our redemption. God is drawing near to us today so that we can drink deeply of His life-giving salvation from sin so that we can go, like the Ethiopian eunuch, "on our way rejoicing" in the God of love and forgiveness. Amen

And now may the peace of God that surpasses all human comprehension guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen

HYMN #417 (vs 1&2) "Just As I Am"

HOLY COMMUNION (10:30 AM Dave Fischer prep and help; 9 AM Nate Kalstad)

HYMN #248 "On Our Way Rejoicing"

BENEDICTION (9 AM): The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and grant you peace. Amen

10:30 AM: PASTOR: 1 Timothy 1:17 *Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen*

DOXOLOGY: (10:30 AM-To the tune of Edelweiss) *May the Lord, Mighty Lord, Bless and keep you forever-- Grant you peace, Perfect peace, Strength in every endeavor. Lift up your eyes and see His face, Feel His grace forever. May the Lord, Mighty Lord, Bless and keep you forever. 9 AM OVH #32*

POSTLUDE: Ray Holmberg

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