

BULLETIN TEMPLATE:

Minnesota Valley Church

Date: Sunday, April 28, 2024

Church Year Date: Fifth Sunday of Easter

Prelude: Rebekah Olson

HYMN #187 “Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing”

CALL TO WORSHIP: Psalm 150

PASTOR: Praise the LORD.

Praise God in his sanctuary;

ALL: Praise him in his mighty heavens.

PASTOR: Praise him for his acts of power;

ALL: Praise him for his surpassing greatness.

PASTOR: Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,

ALL: Praise him with the harp and lyre,

PASTOR: Praise him with tambourine and dancing,

ALL: Praise him with the strings and flute,

PASTOR: Praise him with the clash of cymbals,

ALL: Praise him with resounding cymbals.

PASTOR: Let everything that has breath praise the LORD.

ALL: Praise the LORD.

HYMN #471 “I Am Thine, O Lord”

CHILDREN’S MESSAGE:

Reader: Becky Kruse

First Lesson: *Acts 8:26-40* 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 4:1-11* 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: Apostles' Creed- *I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and earth; And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord; Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit; born of the virgin Mary; Suffered under Pontius Pilate; Was crucified, dead and buried; He descended into hell; The third day He rose again from the dead; He ascended into heaven; And is seated on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; From where He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit; The holy Christian Church; the Communion of Saints; the Forgiveness of sins; The Resurrection of the body, And the Life everlasting. Amen*

Gloria Patri: Ambassador Hymnal p. 4 *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 Receive Offering

PRAISE AND WORSHIP: Songs to be chosen by Hannah

SERMON: "MY HAPPY PLACE" John 15:1-8 Pastor Tom Olson; *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen*

WHERE: Where is your "HAPPY PLACE?" Many people have a happy place, a certain room, a cabin or lakeshore, a workshop or sewing room, mom's kitchen table. I kind of like the rocking chair next to our wood-burning stove. Today, Jesus guides us into his happy place of spiritual fruitfulness. Good soil is a key factor in growing healthy plants, there is good spiritual soil in which to grow a healthy personal spiritual life, that leads to a good family and a strong nation. It all starts in "GOD'S HAPPY PLACE" found in John 15:1-8:

I. A PLACE OF SIMPLICITY: THE UNNECESSARY PRUNED

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.

PRUNING: The first step to finding a happy place of spiritual abundance is to realize it is a place of SIMPLICITY. The unnecessary and the unhealthy need to be pruned away. Since we have about 25 fruit trees, I have spent decades studying and experimenting with pruning. I am still learning. It is a key to getting nice, healthy, large fruit. Pruning is very hard at first because you won't want to cut off nice-looking branches. You need to cut off beautiful branches that are too big for the trunk to support. You need to cut off branches that go too far out and pull the tree down. They will destroy the tree. You need to cut off rubbing branches. You need to cut off fast growing branches that are shooting up but only wasting precious nutrients. It is hard to cut away good branches from our trees and good things from our lives.

TESTIMONY: When I realized that I had a hole in my heart, sleep apnea and two small strokes, I knew something had to go. I quit the

Rosemount community band, which I loved. I resigned from the rewarding Alpha Women's Center board of directors. And I cut back my involvement in the Alaska Mission. God provided the band with new players, God provided Alpha with a dynamic pastor from New Prague to take my place and God provided Jeff Swanson to be the highly qualified leader of the Alaska Mission work. God provided me with a pace of life that allows me to focus on church and home, without being spread too thin.

EXAMPLE: I miss all those things but I am much happier with a narrower focus and less meetings. I know a very good pastor who is so overscheduled that he comes to our weekly prayer late, leaves early and is often called out of the short meeting with a "pressing" phone call. Sometimes I wonder if he might need some pruning!

APPLICATION: Do you need pruning in your life? Are you trying to do too much? Is it causing you to bear small fruit? Maybe you need to prune out some infected branches like anger, bitterness, jealousy and fear.

LESS: When in doubt, choose simplicity. Simplicity is good. We had a man in a church I served who got in big trouble when he had a car of his own. He got in less trouble when he only had a bicycle. And he got in less trouble yet when he just walked. I talked with his social worker about helping him get a car and she so wisely said to me, "For Greg, *LESS IS MORE. The less he has, the better his life is, the more he has, the more trouble he gets into.*" Simplicity is inexpensive. *Psalm 46:10 "Be still and know that I am God."* To merely be still is free, simple and life changing. Just start by taking a moment of stillness in the presence of God.

IMPORTANT: Simplification through pruning is important. If God is pruning good things from your life, don't be upset. He is just making a happy place where you can bear better fruit. **THE HAPPY PLACE IS SIMPLICITY.**

II. A PLACE OF NOURISHMENT: FED BY THE WORD

John 15:5&6 "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.

NUTRITION: Our souls are in great need of the spiritual nutrition that comes from being CONNECTED to the vine of Christ.

OAKS: My dad had a number of extremely large oak trees in his farm yard that were over 100 years old. But they were dying. We thought they had a disease. But a knowledgeable man said that the problem was that in 100 years they had used up all the nutrients in the ground. So, my brother drilled deep holes in the soil around the tree and poured in a soupy mixture of animal manure and water. That was probably 30 years ago and those oak trees have been thriving ever since.

CONNECTED: We can't live spiritually on depleted soil. We need to be connected into the source of nutrition for our souls. That is not a mere mechanical reading of the Word of God but it is a living and vibrant relationship with God where we talk to him, hear His voice, and follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

ALPHA: Our director of the Alpha Women's Center gave her speech at the Gala last Thursday and told us that each year God gives her a theme word for the year. She listens for the Holy Spirit to give that word. This year she got the word TRUST in her spirit. She didn't want that word but time after time in many ways that word TRUST came to her in ways she could not ignore. She accepted and now embraces that word. That is a very real example of someone who is "abiding in the Vine." Anyone who knows her, sees the amazing fruit that is coming from her life dedicated to saving babies from abortion.

John 10:27 "My sheep listen to my voice and they follow me..."

ABIDE: When you know you are being led by the Holy Spirit, the things that come your way are much easier to embrace, even if they are hard. A HAPPY PLACE IS TO ABIDE IN CHRIST.

III. A PLACE OF SATISFACTION: EFFECTIVE PRAYER AND WITNESS

John 15:7&8 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.

SATISFIED: Few things in life make our days happier than seeing our prayer life become effective and seeing the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives, the salvation of lost souls. Before Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples were happiest when they were WITH Jesus, sitting at his feet and learning...doing His work with effective power. After Jesus' ascension and Pentecost, the disciples were happiest when they were gathered together and the Holy Spirit was moving in their midst. Ordinary church services are good, but when the Spirit is moving in our midst, they become something you can't stay away from.

UNHAPPY: What is your definition of unhappiness? I would say a good one is "A MODERN COLLEGE STUDENT." College campuses today are filled with privileged young people that are unhappy, angry, intolerant and even violent. The pro-life college student who spoke at the Alpha Gala receives written death threats under her dorm door and thousands of death threats on line because she is against abortion.

CONTRAST: Last Friday we attended the Free Lutheran Bible College spring concert. What a contrast. These young Bible students were filled with smiles, joy and beautiful music. Their bodies were not all mutilated. They had light in their eyes. The campus was peaceful.

SINFUL: Those who are against God and His Word are UNHAPPY. I know people like that, miserable enemies of God. Galatians 5:19-21 describes so many people today: *"The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."* When they die, they perish into a hellish darkness only because THEY REFUSE to accept the gift of heaven. They love sin and hate God.

CONTRAST: Those who walk with Christ have power in prayer. They respond with love to the angry world. Abiding in Christ is a very HAPPY PLACE. It is the place described in Galatians 5:22ff, a place of *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control...*

Have you moved away from THE HAPPY PLACE that God has for you? He invites you back today to SIMPLICITY, NORISHMENT AND SATISFACTION. It is found *"Near to the Heart of God."* *May the peace of God that surpasses all human comprehension, guard your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen*

Hymn #586 "There is a Place of Quiet Rest"

Lord's Prayer
Benediction

Praise God from whom all blessings flow, Praise Him all creatures here below, Praise Him above, ye heavenly host, Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost. A-men. A-men. A---men.

Postlude: Rebekah Olson