

Sermon Sunday 3rd May – 5th Sunday of Easter

Acts 8:26-end; Psalm 22:25-end; 1 John 4:7-end, John 15:1-8

I read yesterday in my monthly magazine, some celebrity I have never heard of, who said '*I march to the beat of my own drum and think everyone else should do the same, I would never conform to anyone else's beat*', and I thought.... That's so typical of how the world is now – I am so important that I can do what I want, I have rights, I can ignore other people's beat, and I wondered what God thinks of this selfish world where 'I' culture is so important.

Just before our gospel reading, in John chapter 14, Philip (who we hear about later in Acts) asks of Jesus, 'Show me the father so we can be satisfied'. Philip was thinking of himself, of his future and wanted Jesus to prove who he was so he could feel more secure. Jesus replies 'Have I been with you all this time Philip and you still do not know me?'

Then, in today's Gospel, we can see exactly the opposite of individualism. Here, Jesus reassures us that we are all part of the same vine, we are all rooted together in God, and we are all cared for and fed through his sustaining power as we grow in Him, dependent on him rather than self. The picture here of a vine is a great one – God is the stem, with the roots that are strong, full of living water that is being fed into us, the branches. We abide in Him and He abides in us and we can do nothing without him. The branches don't survive without the roots.

God wants us to remain in Him. He wants us to be filled with the spirit and bear fruit. Yes we know we will be pruned, but even I know (and I am a dreadful gardener) that if you prune well, the plant grows even more and bears more fruit. Self has to be pruned away, so we can be filled with God's purpose and spirit.

And this is important for our relationship with God and each other - we believe in God, we know we are all part of the same vine - but we mainly carry on our lives doing the same things every day, not really trusting, not really expecting God to show himself, or to intervene in our lives or our community or our church – Christians sometimes in name only relying on what we can achieve rather than looking to the movement of God's spirit.

Have we been with God all this time without knowing Him? Do we not trust his great power? When I hear statements like 'where will we get the people from to come to this church?', and, 'this is a strange area, nobody will come' etc. we need to remember **God's** strength, not our own and that God died to save the

whole world, Christianity is not limited to areas where we think the demographics are right, God can work anywhere.

We read in Acts 8 what happened to Philip after he had witnessed the resurrection of Jesus. He was filled with faith, and he was obedient and open to the working of God's Holy Spirit. Philip was listening to God. He wanted to go where God needed him and to march to the beat of God's drum - and where does the Holy Spirit send Philip? Down a wilderness road for goodness sake. Probably not many of us would have been instantly obedient to that – 'Are you sure God?' might have been our question, but, reminiscent of his Lord Jesus, Philip took the wilderness road, the road going apparently nowhere, until he sees a vehicle drawn up at the side of the road. And when Philip is instructed to enter a stranger's carriage, instead of holding back, afraid of who he might meet – he RAN to meet the Eunuch. Following God's voice is a privilege, not something to be afraid of.

And God had already prepared the scene, already set the beat – the Eunuch is reading Isaiah's prophesy of the suffering and death of Jesus – the perfect passage to explain the risen Christ, forgiveness, hope and new faith. The Eunuch is so filled with the truth of the Gospel, he pleads to be baptised immediately. And after the baptism, Philip is carried away by the spirit, and Eunuch is left – his eyes have been opened to the truth – he is part of the vine and being nourished by God.

Let us be nourished by God, bear fruit, and be filled with the spiritual gifts of faith, wisdom, knowledge, healing, communication etc. Let's take a chance like Philip to trust and obey the Lord. Let us strive to grow – because if Vines don't grow, they die, and if we don't grow, we wither. If our church doesn't grow it will die, and fade away when we do. Let's be expectant – yes we live in a challenging area – which area of the UK is not challenging? Is it easier to convert people in Hull than here?

Live in God and let him live in you – God has prepared the scene, 'here' is not a problem to God, he loves all people and draws all people to himself, no exceptions – we need to be willing to walk a wilderness road and get into the carriage, for God's work.

The Psalmist says 'Make known God's salvation to a people not yet born – all the ends of the earth will turn to God' we can act on that promise and go out in confidence to do His will, he has set the beat and already has great things planned for us in Him, Amen.