

2 May 2021

*Christ Church New Southgate
& Friern Barnet*

Please join with us at 11am to read this service together either in person, in printed form, whatapp or via the youtube link on our website www.christchurchnsfb.org

Each person in the church is assigned a deacon who will call you to see if you are alright in these times and to pray for you.

Welcome

Children's song: Be Bold

https://youtu.be/x9Bgxzk_P8w

Prayer

**Praise God, from whom
all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, you heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.
Amen.**

Squares - Thank you prayers

Draw 4 dots in a row and then another 3 rows of 4 below it.

. . . .
. . . .
. . . .
. . . .

You will end up with a square grid of 12 dots.

Draw a line between one dot and the other.

If there are two of you in a bubble, you can take turns. When you create a box – you win the box. Write the first letter of the name of a person or a place that you want to thank God for. And keep going till all boxes have a letter in them!

<http://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/2014/05/boxes-prayer-game.html>

Confession

You, O God, are the source
of all our praise
in the great congregation;
we will make our promises
before those who fear God:
The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the Lord shall give praise.

**All the ends of the earth
shall remember and turn to the Lord;
all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.
For dominion belongs
to the Lord,
who rules over all.**

All who sleep in the earth
shall bow down before God;
all who go down to the dust shall worship,
and I shall live for the Lord.

**Our children will serve our God;
future generations
will be told about the Lord,
saying, "The Lord has done it!"
Alleluia!**

Reading: Acts 8.26-40

²⁶ An angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get ready and go south to the road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This road is not used nowadays.) ²⁷⁻²⁸ So Philip got ready and

went. Now an Ethiopian eunuch, who was an important official in charge of the treasury of the queen of Ethiopia, was on his way home. He had been to Jerusalem to worship God and was going back home in his carriage. As he rode along, he was reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹The Holy Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to that carriage and stay close to it.” ³⁰ Philip ran over and heard him reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah. He asked him, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

³¹The official replied, “How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?” And he invited Philip to climb up and sit in the carriage with him. ³²The passage of scripture which he was reading was this:

“He was like a sheep that is taken to be slaughtered,
like a lamb that makes no sound when its wool is cut off.

He did not say a word.

³³ He was humiliated, and justice was denied him.

No one will be able to tell about his descendants,

because his life on earth has come to an end.”

³⁴ The official asked Philip, “Tell me, of whom is the prophet saying this? Of himself or of someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began to speak; starting from this passage of scripture, he told him the Good News about Jesus. ³⁶ As they travelled down the road, they came to a place where there was some water, and the official said, “Here is some water. What is to keep me from being baptized?” ³⁷

³⁸ The official ordered the carriage to stop, and both Philip and the official went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away. The official did not see him again, but continued

on his way, full of joy. ⁴⁰ Philip found himself in Azotus; he went on to Caesarea, and on the way he preached the Good News in every town.

All Age game: Biblical guess who?

The Ethiopian man didn't understand the part of the bible he was reading. I'm going to read out a verse from the Old Testament, just like the Ethiopian man was reading and I wonder if you can guess who it is about? Extra points if you can tell me where the story is in the bible.

1/ Take into the boat with you a male and female of every kind of animal.

2/ She lived in a house built into the city wall, so she let the men down from the window by a rope.

3/ Why isn't this bush burning up? I will go closer and see.

4/ He put his hand into his bag and took out a stone, which he slung at Goliath's head.

5/ Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live I will live, your people will be my people and your God will be my God.

Answers: Genesis 6.18 NOAH, Joshua 2.15
RAHAB, Exodus 3.3 MOSES, 1 Samuel
17.49 DAVID, Ruth 1. 16 RUTH

Confession

O God, our rock of refuge
and our strong fortress,
lead us to your mercy;
guide us as we confess
to you our sin.

You know our limitations and failures;
you have offered
to cleanse us by your word:

Keep us from hurting others,
causing needless conflict,
being impatient,
making hasty judgments,
and forgetting all those
who are struggling.

Cleanse us from all envy
and false pride.
Let your face shine on us, O God;
save us in your steadfast love,
for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Sermon: God has a heart for the lonely.

Last weekend Chloé Zhao was the first woman of colour to win an Oscar for directing *Nomadland*. The film depicts modern day nomads who inhabit the vast plains and deserts of America travelling on the road in vans and trucks, living on the edge of mainstream society but living well and in freedom. Throughout Lent, we considered what worship might mean in a time of wilderness, and here again in Acts we encounter another man in the wilderness. A man on a dusty dry road, remote and unused just a few years later according to Luke's account. Here on a road out of town, not near a church, not near anyone who can explain the bible is, here God sends Philip. The man is in-between places, he has been to Jerusalem and is on his way home. His home is in Ethiopia. In biblical times, Ethiopia was more like Sudan today. His journey was to go down into Gaza, onto through Egypt, and into Sudan. Even today that is a long, long journey by car, let alone by carriage pulled by horse or camel. This man is geographically alone. He is not in his own country and is on a long journey to get there. To this man, alone on the road, God sends Philip. God has a heart for the lonely.

For Philip, he is an active member of the early church. He has been preaching in Samaria, he is an evangelist, a preacher and someone who listens to God when he sends an angel. He

responds immediately to the spirit of God prompting him to go to a random lonely place and so endeavours to serve the Lord. He finds not only a deserted place, he finds an Ethiopian man. This story is important in the whole of the bible as a key narrative that centres on a black man. Philip is a Greek name, so we work on the probability that he was not black. The followers of Christ have been given a commission to proclaim the gospel to the ends of the earth. In the biblical world, Ethiopia was pretty much the ends of the earth. Ethiopia was the very edge of anyone's experience or knowledge of the world. Philip finds a man who is of a different race to himself and is from a place that he barely knows exists. Philip to his credit is happy to run alongside the carriage and hop in to share the good news of Jesus Christ with Philip – a man who was a different race to himself, from an entirely different place to himself.

Here Philip demonstrates the necessity of Christians to share the gospel with whoever is asking about God, no matter where someone is from, no matter what a person's skin colour is. Here we see Luke reminding his readers that the good news about Jesus is not for one race, one place, one people. The good news about Jesus is for all races, for all places, for all people. In particular Luke is highlighting the necessity to share the good news for people of different races to the followers of Christ where they live. Philip is sent to Gaza, not too far from Jerusalem. He is more or less on his home-turf, here he is sent to a visitor, someone not part of his world and is able to share knowledge of Jesus with him.

There are two other important part of this man's identity to talk about. This man is said to be a eunuch and an important official for the Queen of Ethiopia. I hadn't realised that there was in fact a king of Ethiopia at the time. However, in the culture and custom of the day, he was worshipped as a child of the

sun. So the King had spiritual function only. All the business of running a country was given to the Queen mother – Queen Kandake. This man was in charge of the treasury, meet a biblical Rishi Sunak. This not any old man, this man is important. He has the highest office in his country, he has direct access to royalty and is able to make and influence critical national decisions. He is wealthy – he is riding in a carriage not driving it, he has bought a scroll which would have been expensive, he's on a long journey that is not state business, long journeys are never cheap. Even the rich and powerful can find loneliness hard to escape. He has no-one to explain or guide him in his spiritual life. God has a heart for the lonely, even those who are rich and powerful.

But this man is also named as a eunuch. The term used can mean chamberlain official or a man who has been castrated. In the ancient world, it was viewed as necessary to trust royal officials. There was a practice then of only employing eunuchs to serve in the royal courts, particularly for those serving female sovereigns. Ultimately it was thought if there was a chance of servant developing a sexual relationship with the Queen or indeed King, the crown would be at risk. We do not know if this man in Acts 8 was born a eunuch or if he was a slave castrated for the purpose of serving the royal court. It's not an easy topic to consider, is it? It's not a subject often talked about at church but it is here right in the heart of the story of the church. Therefore we have a responsibility to explore and reflect on it together.

Intersex people today can find navigating the modern world challenging. For most of us, our understanding of our sex is limited to our own experience. For those of us who find ourselves in mainstream heterosexual existence, life is straightforward. For anyone else, life is different. For all those people whose sexual identity is still unusual, God has a heart for you.

This Ethiopian eunuch, and all other men and women in similar positions were not held in high esteem. From a biblical or ancient near east perspective anyone who couldn't have a child was seen as second rate. Worse still for men without the ability to make children, these mostly enslaved or born differently men were viewed as effeminate and wholly other to the norms of celebrated strong warriors, farmers, leaders. But God chose to send an angel to send Philip to explain the bible and baptise the eunuch. God has a special heart and concern for those whose sexuality is not mainstream. For those who are born differently, or for those who have been mutilated, God is for you.

A critical experience of those born intersex is one of isolation and loneliness. And yet to this person, God sends a trusted follower, an experienced member of the early church. God leads the eunuch to faith and into joy v39. God met the eunuch through Philip at his point of confusion reading Isaiah. He asks who is speaking in this text? Is it the prophet Isaiah or is he talking about someone else. Philip then had to do some very practical theology. He can't turn to the gospels – they haven't been written yet, he can't turn to Philippians or the other epistles - they haven't been written yet. Philip has to use his experience of the risen Christ and the witness accounts of Christ conquering suffering and pain and entering glory. He shares the beauty of the Holy Spirit with him, offering power and transformation to all. Gladly the eunuch accepts his explanation and offers his life to God. Irenaeus was a Christian writer born in 130AD, he suggests that the eunuch went onto found the Ethiopian church. We know for sure that v39 he continued on his way full of joy. Joyful in the hope of Christ who sees suffering, exclusion, isolation, loneliness and says again and again : you are not alone. I am with you.

Loneliness is something that has become prevalent in our society. The Campaign to end loneliness defines loneliness as the subjective feeling we have when there is a gap between the social connections we have, and those we want. According to the Office for National Statistics around 5% of people in Great Britain (2.6 million adults) reported that they 'often' or 'always' felt lonely between 3 April and 3 May 2020 – this was about the same proportion as before lockdown. Feeling alone is common in our world, and its effects can be damaging to our mental and physical health.

Nomadland explores those who choose live life differently, who choose to live on the road. Many choose this journey to process loneliness in grief, sorrow and trouble. God meets many travellers on the road, Saul on the Damascus Rd, followers of Jesus on the Emmaus Rd and the Ethiopian on the Gaza Rd. God meets each of us too on our journeys, in our loneliness, in our pain and in every experience of exclusion that we encounter. Lonely and isolated as rich, poor, black, white, male, female, intersex – God has a heart for you. Anyone that has been told – you are not good enough, not cool enough, not important enough – God has a heart for you. God has a heart for the lonely, he draws alongside those who are isolated and seeks to remind us all that he is with us. To every lonely and isolated person, God yearns for your joy to be found in a wonderful relationship with him.

The flip side is to all of us who are privileged in whatever way, our responsibility is to listen as Philip did to the Spirit and be willing and able to explain the Christian faith to anyone who is interested. Philip obeyed the Spirit, may we do the same. Every time the Spirit prompts us to pray for someone, to talk to someone, to contact a person may we do it. May we look for the isolated, and lonely. May we know God's heart for the lonely as we travel on our journey together wherever he may lead us. May we see afresh the world

through those who are different to us and seek to build the kingdom of God where all are welcome and all are filled with joy.

Communion

Peace be with you **Peace be with you**
Share peace together in sign language

God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. Acts 10.34-35

Risen Christ
who shows no favouritism
to any people group or nation,
and in whom we are able
to see our creator's desire to work
through people of all nations,
to heal, and bring heavenly peace on earth –
we long to follow your example
and confess our need to grow in this
commitment.

Thanksgiving prayer

Creator God
What must it have been like
for the son of humanity
to share multiple times
about the suffering he was to endure,
how he would be rejected and killed
and then go to experience
these things alone?

Today we celebrate
that Christ's suffering
was not the end of the story
but after three days
the son of humanity rose again.
We give thanks for the body
given for us and the blood
poured out for us.

We draw inspiration
from the apostles' selfless response

of committing themselves
to your message of an all nations church,
working together,
to bring your heavenly healing
and peace on earth. Amen.

In awe and wonder
We will eat and drink
of this table as a sign
of our commitment to your message
of an all nations church,
sacrificially working together
to bring you heavenly healing
and peace to earth.

We remember Jesus breaking bread and
sharing wine with his disciples. Feed us now
as we eat and drink and seek to be your
witnesses on earth as we wait for your return.

Share bread and wine together

Faithful God
As we thank you
that we have been fed at this table,
we pray for people, places and situations
experiencing division, brokenness and
sickness ...

We pray for an outpouring
of your wisdom, love and peace.
Through your all nations church, Lord
please bring healing and transformation.

This we ask through Christ whose ways we
seek to follow in the whole of our lives.

Lord's Prayer active

Our Father in heaven, arms up
hallowed be your name, banner shape
your kingdom come, hands to side
your will be done, side, palms side out
on earth as in heaven. Palms down & up
Give us today our daily bread. Hand
together cupped

Forgive us our sins brush right hand
as we forgive those who sin against us.
brush left hand
Lead us not into temptation fist to chest
but deliver us from evil. Other fist across
For the kingdom, arms wide, palms side
the power, fists lifted
and the glory are yours rain fingers
now and for ever. Right hand pointing, left
hand draw spiral
Amen. Hands clap above head

Blessing

Based on Ephesians 3

⁶I pray that out of God's glorious riches he
may strengthen us with power through his
Spirit, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in our
hearts through faith. And I pray that we,
being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸may
have power, together with all the Lord's holy
people, to grasp how wide and long and high
and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹and to know
this love that surpasses knowledge—that you
may be filled to the measure of all the fullness
of God.

²⁰**Now to him who is able
to do immeasurably more
than all we ask or imagine,
according to his power
that is at work within us,
²¹to him be glory in the church
and in Christ Jesus
throughout all generations,
for ever and ever!
Amen.**

Song: Joy of the Lord, Rend Collective
<https://youtu.be/jCtXS5kAEow>