

**Sermon Notes from CMJ**  
Fifth Sunday of Easter – Year B

**RCL Readings** – Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8

**ACNA Readings** – Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 66:1-11; 1 John 3:11-24; John 14:15-21

**Introduction.** Our celebration of the resurrection continues into the fifth week in the season of Easter. The resurrection brings us much joy and hope. Belief in the resurrection should not remain an intellectual exercise but should produce a change in our behaviour.

**Common Theme.** We will see in our readings that faith is not something passive. Instead, active faith in the life of the believer produces loving behaviour that has been termed “bearing fruit.” The metaphor of bearing fruit is used quite often in the Bible. Bearing fruit in the life of a believer is an identifying characteristic of a follower of Jesus.

**Acts 8:26-40.** Believers can hear the Word of God through many means: through his Scriptures, through his Spirit, through the words of fellow believers. Philip receives a command through an angel of the Lord, obeys, and so encounters the Ethiopian eunuch. Ethiopia had a relationship with Israel, both historical and sacred, through the tradition of the state visit of the Queen of Sheba to King Solomon. From the text in Acts, we see that Ethiopia not only shared diplomatic relations with Jerusalem but that some Ethiopians also shared the faith of Israel. The Ethiopian eunuch held a high rank, worshipped the living God, and was wealthy enough to own a personal copy of the Isaiah scroll. Interestingly, Isaiah 56:4-5 declares a blessing for eunuchs who love God and the Sabbath. This passage from Isaiah probably is the background to God sending Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch, and Philip’s actions of obedience bear fruit in the life and faith of the Ethiopian.

**Psalm 22:24-30.** Psalm 22 has many connections to the sufferings of the Messiah, obviously being quoted during the crucifixion. The psalm also prophetically highlights some positive outcomes of the death and resurrection of Jesus:

- the whole world will hear and come to acknowledge God (v. 27);
- amazingly, the dead are involved in the adoration of the Lord (v. 29); and
- in this world, the poor will have their situation reversed, and they will eat and be satisfied (v. 26).

Psalm 22 begins with the personal cry of anguish and suffering, but also moves to include worshipful praise that is more than personal; it is worldwide. The resurrection is deeply personal, however, it is also communal, bearing fruit that has an impact on the entire world.

**1 John 4:7-21.** One of the primary characteristics in the life of the believer is love. John reminds us of this important aspect in the behaviour of a follower of Jesus: “whoever does not love does not know God.” Love is not an emotion. Love is not something you feel only on Valentine’s Day.

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Love is a choice, which is why it can be commanded. Moses says to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might” and also to “love your neighbour.” In this Epistle, John commands us to love our brother and sister as a response to the love that God has for us. The pinnacle of God’s love was the cross and Jesus’ resurrection. Our response to the love of God is to bear fruit with yet more love. As John says, “This is how love is made complete among us.”

**John 15:1-8.** The background to this teaching of Jesus might be Isaiah 5:1-7, known as the Song of the Vineyard. In Isaiah 5, God is the gardener and Israel is the vineyard. In John 15, Jesus uses the metaphor of the Father as a gardener and the followers of Jesus as the vines in the vineyard. The imagery of the vine remained a powerful metaphor for the believers so that it entered the Eucharistic prayers of the early church as recorded by the *Didache*: “First, as regards the cup, we thank you our Father for the holy vine of David your servant” (*Didache* 9:2). Jesus describes a mutual relationship between his followers and himself. We abide in the Master and the Master abides in his servants. That relationship then produces fruit. The purpose of the relationship is not simply to abide. We do not display our faith in the Messiah by simply acknowledging his Kingship, resurrection and salvation. It is when we bear the fruit of loving action that we prove to be Jesus’ disciples.

**ACNA Addendum**

**Psalm 66:1-11.** This psalm expresses the universal nature of the future worship of God. Salvation was never the sole possession of Israel; it was always to be shared with the Gentiles. This hope is included in the prayer book of the Jewish people. Israel was always meant to be a light to the nations. Here we see that the whole earth is called to praise and adore the Lord. Verse 5 invites us to “come and see what the Lord has done.” In the context of Easter, we the followers of the Messiah declare his resurrection, his great deed of salvation, and invite the world to join us in blessing and praise.

**1 John 3:11-24.** John alludes to the biblical figure of Cain to warn us to avoid hate and to actively practice love. The story of Cain and Abel is an interesting one. No reason is given for the sacrifices brought by the brothers. Meat has not yet been included in the diet of mankind (cf. Gen 9:3-4), yet Abel offers an animal. In the Genesis account, God never communicates to Abel, rather he only speaks with Cain, both before and after the murder of Abel. God never focuses on the sacrifice of Cain. Instead, he pursues the heart and anger issue, which is the true issue at stake. Belief in the resurrection should produce a change in the heart of the believer which will bear fruit in actions of love towards our brothers and sisters. As John says in verse 18, “Let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and in truth.”

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**John 14:15-21.** Loving God is intricately linked to our behaviour. Jesus connects the love we have for him to our obedience to him. Initially, it might seem like a daunting task to follow the commandments of God, perhaps even humanly impossible! Jesus promises us help from the “Advocate,” the Spirit of truth. This “Counselor” or Helper is not an esoteric new-age theory of universal love and kindness that transcends all religions but is the actual presence of the Holy Spirit, a part of the Godhead. That’s powerful! The resurrection leads to a deep mutual relationship involving Jesus, the Father, the Spirit, and ourselves. As Jesus declares, “On that day you will realize that I am in the Father, and you are in me, and I am in you.” We must remember though that the resurrection also changes our behaviour in the forms of love and obedience. As Jesus also says in the next verse, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me.”

**About the author.** The Rev. Aaron Eime is the deacon at Christ Church Jerusalem and teacher for CMJ Israel. Aaron studied in the master’s program at Hebrew University with a focus on early Jewish and Christian interpretation of the Bible. He also studied psychology and sociology at Queensland University in Australia. Aaron is a dedicated Bible teacher exploring the Hebraic roots of the Christian faith. He reads Aramaic and ancient Greek and is fluent in German and Hebrew. He has taught internationally, including in Europe, North America, Hong Kong, and China. He lives in Jerusalem with his wife and three children.