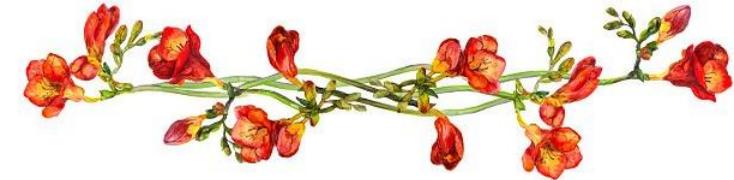


Baptism of the Eunuch, by Rembrandt

Our Service of Worship for May 15, 2022
FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
Westwood First Presbyterian Church **Cincinnati, OH**



GATHERING AROUND GOD'S WORD

Welcome and Announcements

Prelude: “*Celebrate and Ring*”—Dan R. Edwards

Heather MacPhail, director and Chancel Bells

[*During the Prelude, you are invited to take a moment to prepare for worship.*]

Ringling of the Tower Bell

Choral Introit: “*Let Us Rejoice*”—Yarrington

* Where indicated (*), those who are able are invited to stand.

* **Call to Worship** (*Responsive*)

The grace and peace of our Risen Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

And also with you.

Rejoice, people of God: this is our Sabbath day.

Rejoice, friends in Christ: this is our time for worship.

God ordained the Sabbath, for rest and restoration.

God is the One who created us,

The One who calls us, the One who equips us,

The One who loves us without end.

God is worthy of worship, he is our Creator, Healer, and Inspiration.

With joyful hearts, let us worship God.

Opening Prayer



Phillip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, by Unknown Artist (seasonalpreaching.com)



* **Hymn No. 473:** “*For the Beauty of the Earth*”



For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies,
For the love which from our birth over and around us lies,

Refrain: Lord of all, to Thee we raise, this our hymn of grateful praise.

For the wonder of each hour of the day and of the night,
Hill and vale, and tree and flower, sun and moon, and stars of light, [*Refrain*]

For the joy of human love, brother, sister, parent, child,
Friends on earth, and friends above, for all gentle thoughts and mild, [*Refrain*]

For the church that evermore lifteth holy hands above,
Offering up on every shore her pure sacrifice of love, [*Refrain*]

Invitation/Prayer of Confession (*Unison*)

Holy and Merciful Father, we confess to you and to one another, that we have sinned against you by what we have done, and by what we have left undone. We have not loved you with our whole heart, mind and strength. We have not fully loved our neighbors as ourselves. We have not had in us the mind of Christ.

You alone know how often we have grieved you by wasting your gifts, by wandering from your ways. Forgive us, we pray you, most merciful Father; and free us from our sin. Renew in us the grace and strength of your Holy Spirit. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

A Moment for Silent, Personal Confession

Assurance of Forgiveness (*Responsive*)

The prophet Joel wrote: “The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbor his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.” The good news in Christ is that when we face ourselves and God with the awareness of our need, we are given grace to grow, and courage to continue the journey. Friends, believe the good news of the gospel:

In Jesus Christ we are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

May Christ’s peace be with you now—and forevermore.

And also with you.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PRAYER REQUESTS

† May WestFed Food Pantry needs: Cereal, Crackers, and Canned Corn

† **SPECIAL NOTICE** to those who make contributions by check directly from a pension, retirement, or other specific fund/account: Please help our volunteers who record donations by requesting that the financial institution note your name on the check (or attached document). Your doing so will help us maintain correct records for the church and contribute to your receiving an accurate Statement of Giving document. Your assistance will be appreciated!

† Prayers are requested for:

- ♥ Luke, the seven month old nephew of Mike and Amy Babicke, who is undergoing treatment for Kawasaki disease.
- ♥ Janet Ziegler, recently diagnosed with leukemia.
- ♥ Jim Phillips, now at Alois Alzheimer’s Center.
- ♥ Joe Dearwester, recovering from knee replacement surgery.
- ♥ The families of Jane Van Schoik, Jim Becker and Youvon Coleman, who have passed away in the last few weeks.
- ♥ Cathie DeFazio, who is dealing with a rare melanoma behind her right eye, and Larry DeFazio, who is healing from a torn right rotator cuff.
- ♥ Dominic, a teen-aged friend of the Zorn’s, undergoing open heart surgery.
- ♥ Susie, a friend of the Kochheisers, undergoing chemotherapy.
- ♥ Kathy Kiefer, who has been hospitalized with kidney issues.
- ♥ Linda Kugele who continues to deal with breathing issues.
- ♥ Our homebound members and friends.
- ♥ The members of our Session and its committees.
- ♥ The discernment team.
- ♥ Our partnership with City Gosel Mission and the Little Princesses Ballet.



MOMENT FOR MEDITATION: THE ETHIOPIAN EUNUCH

African church tradition maintains that this Ethiopian eunuch, named Bachos according to Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo tradition, was the first Christian missionary to share the Gospel in Africa. What sticks out the most to me, as I read this passage, is the question Bachos asks Philip. “What can stand in the way of me being baptized?” Is he expecting rejection? He has almost certainly faced exclusion at the temple in Jerusalem. Does he expect Christianity to be the same? Unwelcoming to minorities, both racially and sexually?

What is astounding to me is Philip’s (most likely) non-answer. In that space of silence, nothing is found to prevent Bachos from being baptized into the death and resurrection of Christ. He comes as he is, and is welcomed into the body of Christ. No temple is needed to worship, no priests are required, simply an evangelist, the scriptures, and an inquiring heart and mind. God is already at work in reaching out to Bachos through the scriptures when Philip arrives. We can learn a valuable lesson from this passage. Rather than thinking we can “take Jesus” places, might our efforts be more fruitful if we trained our eyes to see where God is already at work, and joining that work? Might we be a better example of the Kingdom reality in the midst of the current systems of the world if we stopped excluding people from our fellowship because they (in our arrogant opinion) don’t have it all together?

Another thing that jumps off the page at me is the passage which Bachos is reading as he travels along. “In his humiliation he was deprived of justice,” quotes verse 33, referring to the suffering servant. The humiliation of the servant makes possible the welcoming into beloved community of the Ethiopian eunuch, who in humiliation was excluded from temple worship. And so we must take notice that the same is true for us. Christ died upon the cross, bearing the full weight of the world’s wickedness, and then in resurrection defeated death. It is through Christ’s finished work upon the cross and his resurrection that anyone can be welcomed into the body of Christ. We join by being baptized into his death and resurrection.

Here we see an opening of the doors. Luke writes that the first non-Jewish (if indeed he is non-Jewish, as it is up for debate) convert to be baptized into the faith is a eunuch from Ethiopia. This man who would have faced exclusion from the religious folks in Jerusalem finds welcome at the feet of Jesus. May we never be so arrogant as to decide anyone is unworthy of that welcome.

~ Matt Wright

* **Response:** “Alleluia, Alleluia, Give Thanks to the Risen Lord” (Unison)

[Refrain]: Alleluia, alleluia, give thanks to the risen Lord.
Alleluia, alleluia, give praise to his Name.

We have been crucified with Christ, now we shall live forever. [Refrain]

Come let us praise the living God, joyfully sing to our Savior. [Refrain]

PROCLAIMING GOD’S WORD

Prayer for Illumination

First Reading: Ephesians 2:13-22—*One in Christ*

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us, ¹⁵ abolishing the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile both to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it

¹⁷ So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near, ¹⁸ for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then, you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰ built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone; ²¹ in him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Second Reading: Acts of the Apostles 8:1, 4-8, 26-40

¹ That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria.

⁴ Now those who were scattered went from place to place proclaiming the word. ⁵ Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah to them. ⁶ The crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip, hearing and seeing the signs that he did, ⁷ for unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, came out of many who were possessed, and many others who were paralyzed or lame were cured. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

²⁶ Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷ So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.”

³⁰ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹ He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³² Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ As they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” ³⁸ He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, 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 snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Sermon: “*How Wide Is Wide?*”

Special Music: “*Lord, I Need You*”—Ron Mallory
Chancel Bells and Heather MacPhail, director

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Invitation to Offering

[No offering will be collected. Please place your offerings in the baskets located at the entrances to the sanctuary. Thank you for your generosity—now and always!]

Offertory Prayer (Unison)

God of All Goodness and Grace, receive the gifts we offer; and grant that our whole life may give you glory and praise; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Offertory Anthem: “*What a Friend We Have in Jesus*”—arr. Sharon Elery Rogers
Chancel Bells and Heather MacPhail, director

Pastoral Prayer and The Lord’s Prayer (unison)

[During the prayer, there will be an opportunity to offer a joy or concern aloud. During the pause, feel free to call out the name of someone for whom prayer is requested, or briefly, a joy or concern on your heart. The prayer concludes with the Lord’s Prayer.]

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us—not into temptation—but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

BEARING GOD’S WORD INTO THE WORLD

*** Hymn No. 298:** “*There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy*”

There’s a wideness in God’s mercy, like the wideness of the sea.
There’s a kindness in God’s justice, which is more than liberty.
There is no place where earth’s sorrows are more felt than up in heaven;
There is no place where earth’s failings have such kindly judgment given.

For the love of God is broader than the measures of the mind,
And the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind.
If our love were but more faithful, we would gladly trust God’s word,
And our lives reflect thanksgiving for the goodness of the Lord.

Charge and Benediction

Choral Response: “*May the Lord Watch over You*”—Ruth Elaine Schram

Postlude: “*Prelude from Fifth Suite*”—Purcell

Leading Worship This Morning:

Rev. Dr. Jeff Colarossi, *Pastor*
Heather MacPhail, *Organist/Director of Music Ministries*
Jason Dennison, *Videographer/Director of Technology*
Steve Beckman, *Lay Worship Leader*