**Easter 5- May 2, 2021**

**Zion, Philipsburg and St. PEters, Linwood**

Welcome to worshipon this 5th Sunday of Easter, May 2, 2021.

Our weather was again a mixed bag this week. There were cooler temperatures, sun and lots of wind on Friday as we ended the month of April. We hope for more spring like weather in the coming weeks!

Some announcements today….Cards made by the community were delivered to the Retirement Home at Nithview this past week. Their lockdown ended on Monday and the residents were very happy to be out of their rooms. More cards were dropped off this week, so the LTC residents will be receiving a card in the next week or so. The response from the community has been uplifting in these continued times of pandemic. We give thanks to God for the love that has been shared to our elders in LTC.

The WFRC in New Hamburg has an ongoing need for items for their foodbank program. The most needed items right now are

* Stew and chili
* Beans in sauce (ex. pork & beans, brown beans in tomato sauce)
* 100% real fruit juice
* Hot drinks (tea, coffee for coffee maker or instant)
* Crackers
* Rice

To drop food donations off at the WFRC office during the Covid-19 pandemic, please call ahead at 519-662-2731 to arrange. You may also drop off food donations Monday to Friday, 9:00 am to 4:30 pm, in the blue food donation tote bin at the bottom of the wooden ramp at their back door. Items may also be left in the bin at Zion or call Pastor Leanne and she will pick the items up at your home to drop off at WFRC.

Coffee hour will take place today at 11:00. Have you considered joining us? All are welcome! Please remember that Zion relies on your contributions in these times. Thank you to all who continue to support and pray for our congregation.

**GATHERING**

The Holy Spirit calls us together as the people of God.

**CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS (ELW p. 211)**

In the name of the Father,

and of the ☩ Son,

and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you and worthily magnify your holy name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Trusting in the mercy of God, Let us confess to God and to one another our failure to love our neighbour:

God of mercy, we confess that we have not borne the fruit of the Spirit. We have not loved others as you love us. We have denied the promises of baptism and cut ourselves off from you. Forgive us, restore us, that we may abide in your love and live out your mercy, for the sake of Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen

**DECLARATION OF FORGIVENESS**

You have already been cleansed by the word that God has spoken to you. In baptism God claimed you and joined you to Christ, as branches to a vine. Believe the promise given to you: in Jesus Christ, you are forgiven.

**GREETING**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God,

and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

**And also with you.**

**PRAYER OF THE DAY**

Let us pray.

O God, you give us your Son as the vine apart from whom we cannot live. Nourish our life in his resurrection, that we may bear the fruit of love and know the fullness of your joy, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

**GATHERING SONG*Where Charity and Love Prevail* (ELW 359)**

1 Where charity and love prevail,
there God is ever found;
brought here together by Christ's love,
by love we thus are bound.
2 With grateful joy and holy fear,
God's charity we learn;
let us with heart and mind and soul
now love God in return.

3 Let us recall that in our midst
dwells Christ, God's holy Son;
as members of each body joined,
in him we are made one.

4 Let strife among us be unknown;
let all contentions cease.
Be God's the glory that we seek;
be his our only peace.

5 Let us forgive each other's faults
as we our own confess,
that we may love each other well
in Christian gentleness

**WORD**

God speaks to us in scripture reading, preaching, and song.

**FIRST READING: Acts 8:26-40**

A reading from Acts.

26An 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.) 27So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” 30So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” 31He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. 32Now 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. 33In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”
34The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” 35Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. 36As 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?” 38He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. 39When 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. 40But 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.

The word of the Lord.

**PSALM: Psalm 22:25-31**

 25From you comes my praise in the great assembly;
  I will perform my vows in the sight of those who fear the Lord.
 26The poor shall eat and be satisfied,
  Let those who seek the Lord give praise! May your hearts live forever!
 27All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord;
  all the families of nations shall bow before God.
 28For dominion belongs to the Lord, who rules over the nations.
 29Indeed, all who sleep in the earth shall bow down in worship;
  all who go down to the dust, though they be dead, shall kneel before the Lord.
 30Their descendants shall serve the Lord,
  whom they shall proclaim to generations to come.
 31They shall proclaim God’s deliverance to a people yet unborn,
  saying to them, “The Lord has acted!”

**SECOND READING: 1 John 4:7-21**

A reading from 1 John.

7Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9God’s love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. 10In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. 12No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.
  13By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. 14And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. 15God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. 16So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.
  God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. 17Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. 18There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. 19We love because he first loved us. 20Those who say, “I love God,” and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. 21The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

The word of the Lord.

**GOSPEL: John 15:1-8**

The holy gospel according to John.

[Jesus said:] 1“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. 2He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. 3You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. 4Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. 5I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. 6Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. 7If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**SERMON**

I am sure that many of you are aware of my love for gardening and nature, as I seem to mention it quite often. I inherited my love for the land from both my mom and dad. I love getting my hands dirty, I love taking vegetable scraps and turning them into rich compost that feeds the earth. I love to plant seeds and watch them grow, then harvest and prepare or preserve the bounty. In the garden is where I find both peace and joy in a weary and broken world.

However, there are a couple things that I do not so much enjoy about gardening, well it is not that I don’t enjoy them, it is that I find them difficult to carry out. Let me explain, if you read the seed packets when planting any small seeds such as beets or carrots you know that you plant the seeds and then thin them when the seedlings grow a couple inches high. This promotes healthy and vibrant growth. But I really dislike having to pull out healthy plants to make room, so even though it may be to the detriment of the plants around it, I keep them all and I usually end up with some squished beets and carrots until I begin to use them.

Another reality of gardening that I find difficult pertains to our gospel reading today in the pruning of fruit trees. In order to bear healthy and plentiful fruit, the branches need to be trimmed, dead and diseased branches need to be removed, the suckers that grow from the base of the trunk above ground level and the branches that grow out crooked or at odd angles need to be trimmed away to allow for air circulation. Again, I am not great at trimming or pruning out the branches. Did I take too much, or did I take too little? The pruning and thinning of the plants around us are difficult but necessary for healthy growth….and it is true for people as well.

 In order for us to grow in love and faith, we too need to be trimmed or pruned at times which is hard for us to acknowledge and understand.

Our gospel reading today speaks to a garden theme in sharing the imagery of a vine bearing fruit from its branches. In our reading from John, Jesus is the vine, God is the vine grower, and the disciples( and us) are the branches. Each of these images cannot survive without the other, all are in relationship with one another. The vine needs the vine grower to provide and nurture the plant, the vine grower needs the vine to produce, and the branches grow from the vine producing and providing sustenance for all. Our reading today speaks to relationships in much the same way the gospel reading last week spoke of the relationship between the shepherd who cares for and provides for his sheep. We are also reminded of our relationship with God the vine grower in our baptism, where we were named and claimed as branches belonging to the vine of Jesus Christ.

Relationships are not always easy, and to be honest, if we are in relationship at some point there will be conflict and disagreement. We are now in the 15th month of the covid pandemic. People are tired, people are frustrated and afraid. For the past 15 months, we have lost our control, we are never sure what the next week or even the next day may bring. Hospital ICUs in our major cities are overflowing, patients are being transported to hospitals that are hours away from their loved ones. And every day we hear of more deaths. The first two waves of the pandemic exposed the cracks in our long-term care homes where we saw thousands of deaths within our elderly population. This third wave has exposed the cracks in how we treat our essential and factory workers who live in multi-generational homes within our largest cities. Many of these essential jobs are low-income jobs filled by people of colour who have no choice but to go work every day. Many of those who are now dying are in their 50’s, 60’s and 70’s. Lives that were cut short, because they had families to provide for and bills to pay, and no sick days to recover safely at home So many lives changed by so much loss and death, children losing parents, and parents losing children.

Now you may wonder where I am going with this. What does this have to do with our relationship with God the vine grower and Jesus the vine? If you have watched the news or been on social media you will have no doubt heard about the freedom rallies taking place in cities and communities around us. These gatherings speak out against the lockdowns citing the loss of personal freedoms like travel and haircuts and going to church and gathering with friends and family. Yes, lives will be lost, but don’t we all die at some point?

And over the past few weeks, Wilmot Township has been embroiled with talk of a White Lives Matter protest taking place in May in an undisclosed location within Wilmot Township. The protest is a racist response to the BLM movement. The WLM movement describes itself as “dedicated to the promotion of the white race and taking positive action as a united voice against issues facing our race.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The BLM statement does not imply that other lives are less important or do not matter, they simply want us to understand that black lives matter as well. This protest and the ongoing unsettledness of the Prime Ministers Path is causing deep division, conflict, and hurt within our community. We are called to acknowledge all of these things and sometimes it requires our branches to be trimmed, so that we grow in understanding of one another.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to bear fruit from our branches to which God will be glorified. Branches get their strength by being connected to the vine, by being in relationship with Jesus Christ through the love of God. When we are trimmed and bear our fruit, we are seeking repentance and forgiveness for our sins, we are denouncing white supremacy and white fragility, we are loving one another by speaking out and standing up for the marginalized, the oppressed, and the poor. We understand that we are all tired and we are all afraid. We all feel a loss of control in all that is going on around us, we are all hurting. But we also understand that does not give us the right to hurt one another with words of hate and bullying, or by claiming indifference to the lives that have been lost in this pandemic. It does not give us the right to say that white lives matter or even all lives matter without understanding that many of our brothers and sister still fight every day to matter in society. It is time for us to discern our past and acknowledge our mistakes and work towards meaningful change where we all can thrive safely. It is time for us to love, as we have been loved. It is simply time for us to love.

When we open our hearts and minds to all that is going on around us, when we see the injustice, when we use our voices to speak out against hate, we are the branches that are being trimmed or pruned, we are the seedlings that are thinned. And even though it is difficult to feel that pruning or trimming, it empowers us to grow in faith and love and it allows our branches to bear even more fruit in a broken and weary world in such need of compassion and love.

So let us get outside and get into our gardens and green spaces. Let us trim and prune our branches. Let us thin out those seedlings. And in doing so may we acknowledge our relationship with the vine and the vine grower, the true God whose love casts out our fear, whose love is never-ending, that calls us into action through the word and love of Jesus Christ. Amen.

**HYMN OF THE DAY*O Blessed Spring* (ELW 447)**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_gFBvwVOQc>

1 O blessed spring, where word and sign
embrace us into Christ the Vine:
here Christ enjoins each one to be
a branch of this life-giving Tree.
2 Through summer heat of youthful years,
uncertain faith, rebellious tears,
sustained by Christ's infusing rain,
the boughs will shout for joy again.
3 When autumn cools and youth is cold,
when limbs their heavy harvest hold,
then through us, warm, the Christ will move
with gifts of beauty, wisdom, love.

4 As winter comes, as winters must,
we breathe our last, return to dust;
still held in Christ, our souls take wing
and trust the promise of the spring.

5 Christ, holy Vine, Christ, living Tree,
be praised for this blest mystery:
that word and water thus revive
and join us to your Tree of Life.

**PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION**

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love. *A brief silence.*

God of all fruitfulness, you abide in your church and your church abides in you. Cleanse us by your word and give yourself to the whole church on earth so that it bears fruit and witnesses to your love. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You have created the heavens and the earth. As we wonder at the beauty of creation, may we seek vital connections among all that depends on the earth for life. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You rule the nations with justice and love. Give the leaders of our world, our countries, and our provinces, assurance of your abiding presence, that they lead not by fear but with love for those they are called to serve offering justice and listening to the needs of the marginalized and the oppressed. We pray for the citizens of Wilmot Township as they deal with and discern the issues of racism and white supremacy in their communities. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You have loved us so that we can love others. We pray for all in need of your love: those who are poor, lowly, outcast, weak, anxious, or fearful. Provide for the needs of all who are suffering from illness or injury. We especially remember Eddy, Elaine, Donelda, Lynette, Barb, Sarah, Alea, Mary Ann, Cheryl, Bonnie, Mary, Ruth, Tilly, Nancy, Robert, Helen, all who are suffering from the effects of Covid, especially the citizens of India where covid variants are ravaging the country leaving victims gasping for breath as oxygen supplies run out, and those we name in the silence of our hearts. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

You gather us with all the saints by the power of your Spirit. With them, may our hearts live forever in your keeping. Hear us, O God. **Your mercy is great.**

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**PEACE**

The peace of Christ be with you always.

**And also with you.**

**THANKSGIVING FOR THE WORD**

 Praise to you, O God, for your Word of life: creating a wondrous universe, proclaiming freedom from captivity, becoming the song of your people. We praise you, O God, for your Word.

Your Word is made flesh among us: with Mary in the garden, you call us by name. With Thomas beholding your wounds, you call us to believe. With sheep of other folds, we are gathered by your voice. Your Word names our death and our life: a seed that falls into the earth and dies, rain and snow that come down from heaven to water the earth, a vine in which we abide. Through your Word, you appoint us to bear fruit, fruit that will last. We bless you, O God, for your Word.

By your living Word, we are witnesses of these things. Breathe into us your Holy Spirit. Open our minds to understand the scriptures. Give us wisdom to declare what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands concerning the word of life. Fill us with strength to love, not in word or speech alone, but in truth and action. With every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, we join in the hymn of all creation, as we thank you, O God, for your life-giving Word. **Amen.**

**LORD’S PRAYER**

Gathered into one by the Holy Spirit, let us pray as Jesus taught us.

**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 trespasses,**

**as we forgive those**

**who trespass against us;**

**and lead us not into temptation,**

**but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,**

**and the power, and the glory,**

**forever and ever. Amen.**

**SENDING**

God blesses us and sends us in mission to the world.

**BLESSING**

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord’s face shine on you with grace and mercy.

The Lord look upon you with favor and ☩ give you peace. **Amen.**

**DISMISSAL**

Go forth into the world to serve God with gladness; be of good courage; hold fast to that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; strengthen the fainthearted; support the weak; help the afflicted; honor all people; love and serve God, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit.

**Thanks be to God.**

**SENDING SONG*Let All Things Now Living* (ELW 881)**

1 Let all things now living
a song of thanksgiving
to God the creator triumphantly raise,
who fashioned and made us,
protected and stayed us,
who still guides us on to the end of our days.
God's banners are o'er us,
God's light goes before us,
a pillar of fire shining forth in the night,
till shadows have vanished
and darkness is banished,
as forward we travel from light into light.

2 God rules all the forces:
the stars in their courses
and sun in its orbit obediently shine;
the hills and the mountains,
the rivers and fountains,
the deeps of the ocean proclaim God divine.
We too should be voicing
our love and rejoicing;
with glad adoration a song let us raise
till all things now living
unite in thanksgiving:
"To God in the highest, hosanna and praise!"

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1. *White Lives Matter,* accessed May 1, 2021, <https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/extremist-files/group/white-lives-matter>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)