

St. James Episcopal Church * Morning Prayer

Worship Leader Bruce Louwagie

Processional Hymn (H686) Come, thou fount of every blessing

GOD OF LOVE & MERCY

68 Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing

1 Come, thou Fount of ev-ery bless-ing, tune my heart to sing thy grace;
2 Here I raise to thee an al-tar, hith-er by thy help I've come;
3 O to grace how great a debt-or dai-ly I'm con-strained to be!

streams of mer-cy, nev-er ceas-ing, call for songs of loud-est praise.
and I hope, by thy good plea-sure, safe-ly to ar-rive at home.
Let thy good-ness, like a fet-ter, bind my wan-dering heart to thee;

Teach me some me-lo-dious son-net, sung by flam-ing tongues a-bove;
Je-sus sought me when a stran-ger, wan-dering from the fold of God;
prone to wan-der, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love;

praise his name—I'm fixed up-on it—name of God's re-deem-ing love.
he, to res-cue me from dan-ger, bought me with his pre-cious blood.
here's my heart, O, take and seal it; seal it for thy courts a-bove.

WORDS: Robert Robinson (1735-1790)
MUSIC: John Wyeth's *Repository of Sacred Music*, 1813

NETTLETON
8.7.8.7.D.

- 26** All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, *
and all the families of the nations shall bow before him.
- 27** For kingship belongs to the LORD; *
he rules over the nations.
- 28** To him alone all who sleep in the earth bow down in worship; *
all who go down to the dust fall before him.
- 29** My soul shall live for him;
my descendants shall serve him; *
they shall be known as the LORD's for ever.
- 30** They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn *
the saving deeds that he has done.

The Lessons

First Lesson: Acts 8:26-40

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.) So 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 and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. 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.
In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. 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?" He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. 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. 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.

Second Lesson: 1 John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In 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. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So 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. Love 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. There 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. We love because he first loved us. Those 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. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

Gradual Hymn: (H685) Rock of ages, cleft for me

The Christian Life

685

1 Rock of a - ges, cleft for me, let me hide my-self in thee;
2 Should my tears for ev - er flow, should my zeal no lan - guor know,
3 While I draw this fleet-ing breath, when mine eye - lids close in death,

let the wa - ter and the blood from thy wound - ed side that flowed,
all for sin could not a - tone: thou must save, and thou a - lone;
when I rise to worlds un - known and be - hold thee on thy throne,

be of sin the dou - ble cure, cleanse me from its guilt and power.
in my hand no price I bring, sim - ply to thy cross I cling.
Rock of a - ges, cleft for me, let me hide my-self in thee.

The image shows a musical score for a hymn. It consists of three systems of music. Each system has a vocal line (treble clef) and a piano accompaniment line (bass clef). The music is in a 4/4 time signature with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are printed below the vocal line of each system. The first system contains three verses. The second system contains the main body of the hymn. The third system contains the final lines of the hymn.

Words: Augustus Montague Toplady (1740-1778), alt.
Music: *Toplady*, Thomas Hastings (1784-1872)

77. 77. 77

Third Lesson: John 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide 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. I 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. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

The Sermon:

The psalm selection for today, a portion of Psalm 22, can catch us by surprise.

Psalm 22 is famously associated with Holy Week. Jesus, suspended from the cross, close to death, quotes its opening words: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" And here we have it in the Easter season.

But this psalm takes unexpected turns, as many psalms do, and by the time we reach today's portion, the final seven verses, the tone is decidedly different, even serene and triumphant.

Let's focus on a single one of these verses. Like a global map, it is small in itself, yet sets forth an entire world, a world well worth our exploration. The verse to keep in mind is this: "The poor shall eat and be satisfied, and those who seek the Lord shall praise him: 'May your heart live for ever!'"

As part of a psalm selection for the Easter season, this verse summons us to consider how it sets forth the consequences of the resurrection of Christ. But what is going on in this small verse? In a word, celebration! Celebration sparked by the manifest generosity of God. People who are poor, afflicted, hungry; people who are humble, spiritual seekers—they will have their desires met.

There is no reason here to distinguish between hunger for daily bread and hunger for spiritual bread, for God supplies them both. God supplies to the point of satisfaction;

there will be no shortage, but plenitude. Humble spiritual seekers, eager to encounter God—they will experience satisfaction. They will not have to settle for consolation prizes but will see God face-to-face as a friend and will respond with endless praise.

This verse is a prophecy of nourishment and vision, nourishment provided by God in the sight of God—and finds fulfillment in Christ's resurrection.

These great fifty days of Easter recall the appearances of our risen Lord, yes, but Easter extends far beyond this, for it contains as well a reliable promise of both nourishment for all the afflicted, the feeding of hungry hearts, plus an ever-expanding vision of God that incites endless praise. The church's entire journey throughout history and beyond and the journey of every single Christian amounts to an extension of Easter.

How can this be? Consider today's gospel: Jesus the vine, ourselves as the branches. The Jesus Movement spreads across the earth, moves throughout time, bears abundant fruit. The poor are fed from soup kitchens and from resplendent altars. Don't separate these two, for the same Christ feeds the hungry from both. Seekers meet God and they praise God; praising God, they desire God still more. This pair of actions, the seeking and the praising, are not separate, but responses to the one who satisfies us yet renews our desire.

The psalmist sets this forth as a prophecy. Its reality is ours because of Easter: the one resurrection life in heaven as on earth.

But our small verse is not yet done, and neither are we, my friends. The verse concludes with something said by an unnamed voice: "May your heart live for ever!"

This exclamation sounds like a toast, an exclamation of well-wishing extended to everyone when glasses are lifted up. "May your heart live for ever!" Who pronounces this toast remains unclear to us. Perhaps it is God.

“May your heart live for ever!” Here is one of those scriptural declarations that from a certain angle says everything that can be said, everything we need to hear. If we understand this declaration, we require nothing more.

“May your heart live for ever!” For us to have this ordinary, earthly existence, it is necessary for the heart, that organ in our chest, to live. When it sickens, we are impaired. When it expires, then we are dead. We know this to be true.

On an even deeper level, we know that our heart, the core of our existence, must be alive if we are to live. People sometimes walk around with dead hearts; they are dead to God, other people, the earth, and even themselves. Their hearts have become stone, and in all the ways that matter, they are as insensate as stone. And so, throughout Scripture, God keeps asking us to trade our stone hearts for hearts of flesh; the faithful keep calling out for God to place inside them new and living hearts.

We can look beyond this scriptural language to something based upon it. For consider this: all the devotional and liturgical and formational equipment of Christianity, sermons and icons and creeds, hymns and songs and anthems, sacraments and prayers and processions, prayer beads and crosses and vigorous AMENs, the entirety of this apparatus in its splendor and variety and insistence, it all serves one grand purpose: to keep our hearts from becoming hard, to keep our hearts from going dead, and when they do, to restore and resurrect them through the one way available, which is the mercy of God. The whole blessed deal is simply this: The Holy One takes away your heart of stone and gives you a heart of flesh, and does this time and again, as often as it needs to happen.

“May your heart live for ever!” Hear this primary toast at Christ’s banquet, for above all else our hearts need to live, and when they live forever, then they are hearts amply nourished, hearts that beat in the presence of God and according to the rhythm of divine life.

“May your heart live for ever!” This blessing appears in the Psalter, but we are not told who bestows it. But we can speak it now to one another, we can greet one another with these words, for this is the prayer that God almighty offers on our behalf and is doing everything to fulfill.

When we live here and now with fleshy hearts rather than stone hearts, then good things happen. Our single verse from Psalm 22 reveals some of them.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied. When we have hearts of flesh, we recognize the poor surrounding us, those afflicted in many ways, and we want them to enjoy food that will sustain them. And so, we work and we pray and we give because there is love in our hearts. We even take risks for justice, for as Cornel West says, “Never forget that justice is what love looks like in public.” AMEN!

Those who seek the Lord shall praise the Lord. When we have hearts of flesh, we recognize all around us people seeking the Lord whether or not they know it, whether or not they are walking in the right direction. We want those who seek to find, and those who find to praise. And so, we work and we pray and we give because there is love in our hearts. We take some risks for mercy, remembering that mercy has been shown to us. AMEN!

“May your heart live for ever.” This is God’s prayer for us. May we pray it on our own behalf and for one another. This prayer is where Easter takes us. AMEN!

May your heart live for ever!

The Rev. Charles Hoffacker lives in Greenbelt, Maryland, with his wife, Helena Mirtova. He is the author of A Matter of Life and Death: Preaching at Funerals. Many of his sermons appear on the lectionary preaching website SermonWriter and he contributes regularly to Sermons That Work.

I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the dead, On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen

Peace of the lord be with you

Announcements

Offertory Hymn: WLP 812 "Here I Am Lord"

Here I Am, Lord

Verses



1. I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my
 2. I, the Lord of snow and rain, I have borne my
 3. I, the Lord of wind and flame, I will tend the

peo - ple cry. All who dwell in dark and sin
 peo - ple's pain. I have wept for love of them.
 poor and lame. I will set a feast for them.

My hand will save. I who made the
 They turn a - way. I will break their
 My hand will save. Fin - est bread I

stars of night, I will make their dark - ness bright.
 hearts of stone, Give them hearts for love a - lone.
 will pro - vide Till their hearts be sat - is - fied.

Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?
 I will speak my word to them. Whom shall I send?
 I will give my life to them. Whom shall I send?

Refrain



Here I am, Lord. Is it I, Lord? I have heard you
 call - ing in the night. I will go, Lord, if you
 lead me. I will hold your peo - ple in my heart.

Officiant The Lord be with you.

People And also with you.

Officiant Let us pray.

The Prayers

The Lord's Prayer

BCP 97

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by 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, for ever and ever. Amen.

Suffrage B

BCP98

Save your people, Lord, and bless your inheritance;

Govern and uphold them, now and always.

Day by day we bless you;

We praise your Name for ever.

Lord, keep us from all sin today;

Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy.

Lord, show us your love and mercy;

For we put our trust in you.

In you, Lord, is our hope.

And we shall never hope in vain.

The Collect of the Day: Almighty God, whom truly to know is everlasting life: Grant us so perfectly to know your Son Jesus Christ to be the way, the truth, and the life, that we may steadfastly follow his steps in the way that leads to eternal life; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

The Prayers of the People, Form III 387

Father, we pray for your holy Catholic Church;

That we all may be one.

Grant that every member of the Church may truly and humbly serve you;

That your Name may be glorified by all people.

We pray for all bishops, priests, and deacons;

That they may be faithful ministers of your Word and Sacraments.

We pray for all who govern and hold authority in the nations of the world;

That there may be justice and peace on the earth.

Give us grace to do your will in all that we undertake;

That our works may find favor in your sight.

Have compassion on those who suffer from any grief or trouble;

That they may be delivered from their distress.

Give to the departed eternal rest.

Let light perpetual shine upon them.

We praise you for your saints who have entered into joy;

May we also come to share in your heavenly kingdom.

Let us pray for our own needs and those of others.

Silence

The General Thanksgiving

101

Almighty God, Father of all mercies, we your unworthy servants give you humble thanks for all your goodness and loving kindness to us and to all whom you have made. We bless you for your creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up our selves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with you and the Holy Spirit, be honor and glory throughout all ages. Amen.

A Prayer of St. Chrysostom

Almighty God, you have given us grace at this time with one accord to make our common supplication to you; and you have promised through your well-beloved Son that when two or three are gathered together in his Name you will be in the midst of them: Fulfill now, O Lord, our desires and petitions as may be best for us; granting us in this world knowledge of your truth, and in the age to come life everlasting. Amen

Recessional Hymn **671** **Amazing Grace** hymnal

AMAZING GRACE

NEW BRITAIN



1. A - maz - ing grace! How sweet the sound That saved *a
2. 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my
3. The Lord has prom - ised good to me, His word my
4. Through man - y dan - gers, toils, and snares, I have al -
5. When we've been there ten thou - sand years, Bright shin - ing



1. wretch like me! I once was lost, but
2. fears re - lieved; How pre - cious did that
3. hope se - cures; He will my shield and
4. read - y come; 'Tis grace has brought me
5. as the sun, We've no less days to



1. now am found, Was blind but now I see.
2. grace ap - pear The hour I first be - lieved!
3. por - tion be As long as life en - dures.
4. safe thus far, And grace will lead me home.
5. sing God's praise Than when we'd first be - gun.

Alternate text: "and set me free!"

Text: CM; verses 1-4, John Newton, 1725-1807; verse 5, anon., fr. *A Collection of Sacred Ballads*, 1790.
Music: *Columbian Harmony*, 1829.

Go in Peace to love and service the Lord –

Thanks be to God –