

Fifth Sunday of Easter
Cycle B RCL

Acts 8:26-40

Christians adopted the view of Jewish apocalyptic (end-of-the-world) writers that the scriptures were full of hidden prophecies of the end of time, prophecies that only members of the apocalyptic sect understood. Philip had to show the eunuch that the hidden meaning of the passage he was reading (Isaiah 53:7-8) was about Jesus. For centuries commentators have pointed out that a eunuch, whether Ethiopian or Jewish, was not to worship within the temple precincts in Jerusalem. This prohibition is yet another Jewish practice of which the non-Jewish author of Acts is unaware. “Candace” (Greek: *kandake*) is a traditional title of unclear meaning applied to the queen of Ethiopia in hieroglyphic records. The road down from Jerusalem to Gaza boasts few water sources, and this led Edward Robinson in 1841 to suggest Tell el-Hesi, east of Ashkelon, as a likely location for this story. Azotus is just north of Gaza on the Mediterranean.

Psalm 22:24-30

The first verses of this long *lament* are very familiar to Christian readers as Jesus’ cry of dereliction from the cross (Mark 15:34 and parallels). A full lament not only begs God for deliverance from various evils but also promises an act of thanksgiving in the Temple if God fulfills the psalmist’s request. Today’s portion of the lament contains that promise along with the expectation that all who hear it will benefit. The promise that the psalmist’s descendants will continue to offer that thanksgiving (verses 29b-39) is unusual. Most English versions reckon the beginning of this passage as verse 23 (Hebrew verse 24) instead of verse 22 as does the *Book of Common Prayer*.

1 John 4:7-21

This passage reiterates the author’s view that love is the mode by which Christ is present with his followers to save them. Indeed, as the author sees, it the meaning of the atoning death of Christ is that it demonstrates the divine, redeeming love (verse 9). Reference to the Spirit in verse 13 would be striking in a Jewish context, for Jews believed that the Spirit had left the world and would not return until the last days. The section ends with reminders that love leaves no place either for fear (verse 18) or for hatred (verse 20).

John 15:1-8

The unknown author of the Fourth Gospel explores several metaphors to represent the relationship of Christ as *logos*, “word,” (John 1:1, 14) to those who have received new birth. The figure of the vine and branches is an organic model, stressing the mutual indwelling of the disciples and Jesus.

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