

The Benefice of Cogenhoe and Great Houghton
and Little Houghton with Brafield on the Green

Sermon May 2nd May 2021, 5th Sunday of Easter

Readings: Acts 8: 26-end Ps 22: 25-end, I John 4: 7-end, John 15: 1-8

‘May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight O Lord my Rock and my Redeemer’.

Are you ready to be pruned? If Jesus is the vine and we are the branches, then the Holy Spirit is like the sap that runs between the vine and the branches giving nourishment and helping us to grow and bear fruit. We need to be firmly grafted into Jesus the vine for the Spirit to flow liberally, bringing the life-giving sap to bring forth the spiritual fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. God the Father is the gardener who tends the vine, guiding the branches to where they are best supported and able to bear fruit, and pruning the branches to make them more fruitful and healthy.

God is Love, we are assured that by John in his epistle, and he invites us into his community of Love. However, the act of pruning cannot always be performed without a degree of discomfort. Jesus never promised that following him would be pain-free. He commanded us to pick up our cross and follow him, and he himself suffered pain in order to save us. Love costs. But the act of pruning is performed precisely because the gardener wants the best for each of the branches and to make them more fruitful and healthy, and (when thinking of us in the church) it is because he values and loves us.

The un-named Ethiopian Court official in today’s story from Acts, was moved by the suffering of the one who suffered ‘like a lamb that is meekly led to its slaughter’ in the portion of Isaiah that he was reading, and Philip following God’s guidance through the message of an angel and the Spirit’s leading, was able to explain to him that Jesus was the one who had willingly laid down his life in order to save us and that the sacrifice had been sufficient, as he had been raised from the dead. This was no chance meeting. The road he was travelling was a wilderness road, so he would not have expected anyone to be there to explain the scriptures to him, But this meeting happened because Philip was open to God’s prompting, even when it was unexpected, and the early Church spread into Africa as a result via an emasculated man who came to realise that he was still valuable in the sight of God! The Coptic Ethiopian Church has its roots as one of the earliest church plants.

If we as a church are to grow then we have to be open to God’s leading- even if it is not exactly what we had planned ourselves. Philip had not planned to divert to the wilderness road, and it seems he was somehow whisked away after baptising the official to follow the Spirit’s leading elsewhere. What is important is to focus ourselves on Jesus so that we can be open to God’s leading. Getting to grips with God’s word and spending time reading it and in prayer are probably the best ways to keep our spiritual eyes and ears open to God’s leading. Amen

Jenny Smith

Lay Reader