

Australian Evangelical Lutheran Church
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA, OUR SAVIOUR LOWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, TRINITY MARBURG, TRINITY OAKY
28th April Fifth Sunday of Easter

HYMNS: 164 51 394 840 291 783

INTROIT: Psalm 150.

Praise the LORD! Praise God in His sanctuary! Praise Him in His mighty spread of sky!

Praise Him for His powerful deeds! Praise Him for His abundant greatness!

Praise Him with the blast of the trumpet! Praise Him with the harp and lyre!

Praise Him with the tambourine and circle-dance! Praise Him with stringed instruments and wind instruments!

Praise Him with clashing cymbals! Praise Him with crashing cymbals!

Let everything that has breath praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!

COLLECT: O God, You make the minds of Your faithful people to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that, among the many changes of this world, our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS

Acts 8:26-40 Philip and the Ethiopian

1 John 4:1-21 God's love in us.

John 15:1-8 The true Vine and the fruitful branches.

Welcome to all worshipping with us!

Pastor Ziebell can be contacted via phone/text at 0407 583922.

Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

Email him at paziebell@gmail.com or to the church office at ddaalc@gmail.com.

Pastor is usually in his office Tuesday-Wednesday for anyone who would like to call in. Other days of the week are set aside for visits.

Acts 8:26-40

²⁶ An angel of the Lord told Philip, “Get up and go southwards on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza!”

This is desert. ²⁷ He got up and went. A man from Ethiopia was there, a eunuch, who was a high official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians. He had gone to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was on his way home. He was sitting in his chariot and reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go up to this chariot and stay close to it!”

³⁰ Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

³¹ He answered, “How could I, unless someone guided me?”

He invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² The passage of the Scripture that the man was reading was this: “**He was led like a sheep to be slaughtered and, as a lamb is silent before its shearer, so He did not open His mouth.**

³³ **In His humiliation, His justice was taken away. Who will describe His descendants? For His life has been taken from the earth.”**

³⁴ The eunuch answered Philip, “I ask you, about whom is the prophet saying this, about himself or someone else?”

³⁵ Then Philip began to speak. He began from this passage of Scripture and told him the Good News about Jesus. ³⁶ As they were travelling down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, “Look! Here is water. What is there to prevent me from being baptised?”

³⁸ He ordered the chariot to stop. Both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and Philip baptised him. ³⁹ When they had come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ However, Philip was found at Ashdod. As he passed through all the cities, he kept telling the Good News, until he came to Caesarea.

1 John 4:1-21

¹ Dearly loved people, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God! For many false prophets have gone out into the world. ² This is how you recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. ³ However, any spirit who does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and which is already now in the world. ⁴ You are from God, little children, and you have overcome them, because the One who is in

you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world. That is why they speak from the viewpoint of the world and the world listens to them.

⁶ We are from God. He who knows God listens to us. He who is not from God does not listen to us. In this way we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

⁷ Dearly loved people, let us love one another! For love comes from God, and everyone who loves has been given birth by God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love has not known God, because God is Love. ⁹ This is how God has shown His love among us: He has sent His only Son into the world that we may live through Him. ¹⁰ This is what love is: not that we have loved God but that He has loved us and has sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

¹¹ Dearly loved people, since that is how God has loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us, and His love has been brought to maturity in us. ¹³ This is how we know that we remain in Him and He in us: He has given us His Spirit. ¹⁴ We have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son as the Saviour of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him, and he remains in God. ¹⁶ We have also known and have believed the love that God has for us. God is Love, and he who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him.

¹⁷ His love has been brought to maturity with us in this, that we have confidence on the Day of Judgment, because we are like Him in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but mature love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment. The person who is afraid has not been brought to maturity in love. ¹⁹ We love because He first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," but hates his brother, he is a liar. For no one who fails to love his brother, whom he has seen, can love God, whom he has not seen. ²¹ This is also the Commandment that we have from Him, that he who loves God should also love his brother.

John 15:1-8

¹ "I am the true Vine, and My Father is the Gardener. ² He takes out every branch in Me that does not bear fruit and prunes every branch that bears fruit, that it may bear more fruit. ³ You are already clean because of the Word that I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in Me, and I shall remain in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, neither can you, unless you remain in Me. ⁵ I am the Vine. You are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit. For without Me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in Me, he is thrown away like the branch and withers.

Such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burnt. ⁷ If you remain in Me, and My Words remain in you, ask for whatever you wish! It will be done for you. ⁸ By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and become My disciples.

WE LOVE BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US
Sermon for the 5th Sunday of Easter 2024
1 John 4:1-21

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

The text for our sermon today is the Second Reading from before, 1 John 4:1-21, but focussing on John's words about love: **Dearly loved people, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God! For many false prophets have gone out into the world.** ² This is how you recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit who confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God. ³ However, any spirit who does not confess Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and which is already now in the world. ⁴ You are from God, little children, and you have overcome them, because the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵ They are from the world. That is why they speak from the viewpoint of the world and the world listens to them. ⁶ We are from God. He who knows God listens to us. He who is not from God does not listen to us. In this way we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

⁷ Dearly loved people, let us love one another! For love comes from God, and everyone who loves has been given birth by God and knows God. ⁸ The one who does not love has not known God, because God is Love. ⁹ This is how God has shown His love among us: He has sent His only Son into the world that we may live through Him. ¹⁰ This is what love is: not that we have loved God but that He has loved us and has sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹ Dearly loved people, since that is how God has loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God. If we love one another, God remains in us, and His love has been brought to maturity in us. ¹³ This is how we know that we remain in Him and He in us: He has given us His Spirit. ¹⁴ We have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son as the Saviour of the world. ¹⁵ If anyone confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God remains in him, and he remains in God. ¹⁶ We have also known and have believed the love that God has for us. God is Love, and he who remains in love remains in God, and God remains in him.

¹⁷ His love has been brought to maturity with us in this, that we have confidence on the Day of Judgment, because we are like Him in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but mature love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment. The person who is afraid has not been brought to maturity in love. ¹⁹ We love because He first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, “I love God,” but hates his brother, he is a liar. For no one who fails to love his brother, whom he has seen, can love God, whom he has not seen. ²¹ This is also the Commandment that we have from Him, that he who loves God should also love his brother.

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

How often do we hear the word “love”? We use it so freely, so loosely. We use it for the food we eat. We use it for clothing, cars, hairstyles, and lots of things we like, but instead of saying “like,” we say “love.”

A step up from that very loose use of “love” is when we apply the word to people. But even there, it can be overused. So many songs have “love” in the lyrics, but what they mean is “I’m really infatuated with you” or something like that.

A better use of the word “love” is when we use it about people for whom we have a strong and lasting personal affection. “I love my mum and dad.” “I love my husband or wife.” “I love my children.” That’s pretty good. That’s the love of personal affection.

But we can do even better than that. There is the love of *commitment* and of *caring and serving others*. We touched on that last week. That is really the best and highest use of the word “love.” And where and how do we learn that kind of love? That’s what we shall take up today.

In His Letter, the Apostle John says, **“We love because He first loved us.”**

If we do not love, it raises the question of if we even know God or love God. John writes: **“If anyone says, “I love God,” but hates his brother, he is a liar. For no one who fails to love his brother, whom he has seen, can love God, whom he has not seen.”** Again: **“The one who does not love has not known God.”** In other words, if you say you’re a Christian and that you love God, but you do not love your fellow Christian, then there’s a serious disconnect there. To not love your brother or sister in Christ is *a serious matter*.

See, here is the situation that John is addressing in his Letter: There were apparently some members of the churches in and around Ephesus who thought

they were superior Christians to the other church members because they had some secret knowledge that the others did not have. Now, these supposedly superior Christians had pulled out from the congregation and formed their own group. In doing so, they were not showing love and commitment to the truth and commitment to their fellow Christians. While claiming to know God and to love God, these super-Christians would not help a brother in his practical need, and John says in his Letter that that's not right. If you claim to love God, how can you not love your fellow Christians?

Well, let's not just stay back there at that time. What about us? Has your love failed at times? Do you not do all that you can for others because you are too selfish and too turned in on yourself? Perhaps you don't help or care for people as much as you could. Maybe you are slow to forgive a person who has hurt you. That's a shortage of love right there. Love can be costly because it means extending effort or cost, self-sacrifice or some sort, on behalf of another.

It's because of this lack of love on our part that God's love *had to intervene*. John says, **"We love because He first loved us."** If we are going to talk about our love for others, we first need to talk about God's love for us. That's how we know what love truly is. That's how we experience love, the real deal. That's how we receive love, more than enough so that we have love to give away. It all starts with God's love for us.

"He first loved us," and this is how it came down: God showed how much He loved us when our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, came down from heaven for us men and for our salvation. Here it is; our text tells us: **"This is how God has shown His love among us: He has sent His only Son into the world that we may live through Him."**

"This is how God has shown His love among us." Yes, in Christ is love! God **"has sent His Son as the Saviour of the world."** We know that it's there, that God does indeed love us. **"He has sent His only Son into the world that we may live through Him."** God's love is not just a feeling; it's love that takes action. God sent His Son into the world on a mission. God's love has a purpose and a result. The purpose and the result is that we would live. That we would live with God in a new and restored relationship. Live a new life, alive in Christ, alive in the Spirit. That we would live forever, forever with our Lord and with His people. That's what God's love is and what it does.

John goes on: **"This is what love is: not that we have loved God but that He has loved us and has sent His Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."**

Christ being the “**atoning sacrifice for our sins**” is *precisely* how God loved us. Jesus has made the sacrifice that satisfies God’s wrath against sinners, suffering the punishment that satisfies God’s justice. Jesus has paid for our sins so that now they are removed from our record. God is not angry with us anymore. Jesus has taken the penalty that our sins deserve. *In God’s courtroom, we are declared not guilty.* And God is not being a slacker of a judge. No, the penalty has already been served. Jesus paid for it on the cross. Jesus did it all for us out of God’s great love for us. Now, this is the greatest love of all! What John is saying here in his Letter is the same thing that he said in that familiar verse from his Gospel, “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16).

Who can measure this love of God? It goes beyond our imagination. But it is real; we have received it, we have experienced it, and we are saved by it. “**This is how we know that we remain in Him and He in us: He has given us His Spirit,**” John writes. So now we know what love is. Through faith in Christ, we know love, and the Holy Spirit works this love in us so that now we, you and I, actually begin to love others. Love is the fruit of faith. It always is. That is why it is such a contradiction for a Christian not to love his brother or sister. Instead, “**We love because He first loved us.**” The one follows the other as a natural consequence. It’s like a branch connected to a healthy vine. It will produce fruit, good fruit, and we are connected to Christ, the living Vine. His life and His love will produce the fruit of love in our lives.

So, do you want to know the secret of loving others? Our Gospel today gave us the answer: Remain in Christ.¹ Stay connected to Him. As you remain in Him, His love will abide in you and produce that good fruit. How do we stay connected to Christ? Well, it’s happening here today. You are here today, in church, to receive Christ’s love anew, to remain in Him, to be refreshed in your walk with Him. This is where we hear Christ’s voice. This is where the Spirit does His work in our lives. This is where we receive Christ’s very body and blood for our forgiveness. Remain in Christ, and you will produce the fruit of love in your life. “**We love because He first loved us.**”

Love also means forgiveness. Think of God’s love for us. It’s all about forgiveness. It’s all about reconciliation and restoration. And so it is with our love for one another. Is there a brother or sister with whom you bear a grudge, someone whom you simply cannot bring to forgive? It doesn’t matter who’s at

¹ John 15:1-8

fault. Love moves toward that brother or sister. It does not pull away. ***Love seeks reconciliation.*** It happens in the congregation, among our members. It happens in the home and the family, one family member forgiving the other. Love and forgiveness go hand in hand.

“We love because He first loved us.” First comes God’s love, and then that bears fruit in our lives as we learn to love one another. On any given Sunday after we receive the Lord’s Supper, we pray, *“We give You thanks, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this healing gift, and we pray that through it, You would graciously strengthen us in faith toward You and in love toward one another.”* Did you catch that? *“In faith toward You and in love toward one another.”* That’s a pretty good summary of the Christian life. Faith toward God, that is, trust in God because of what He has done for us in Christ, *“and in love toward one another.”*

“We love because He first loved us.” The one will always produce the other. God’s love for us produces the good fruit of love for others in our lives. **“Love comes from God, and everyone who loves has been given birth by God and knows God..”** And that is you - yes, you! Believe it, it’s true. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, You have sent Jesus, Your holy Servant, into the world, not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life to redeem all people. After He had offered His life as the one sacrifice for all sins for ever, You raised Him from the dead by Your glorious power. Give us a living faith in Him, so that we may possess the sure hope of eternal life through Him.

We thank You for all Your kindness in our lives. We praise You for every blessing that You give us, and that Your mercy is never-ending.

We thank You, O Father of all light, for taking away the darkness of our minds and spirits, and for revealing to us Your Word of truth in Jesus Christ. Pour out Your Spirit on us, that He may continually plant Your Word in our hearts. Increase our willingness to study the Scriptures, and our understanding of them.

We thank You for the fellowship of believers in Your church. Keep us all in the unity that the Spirit gives, and in the peace that binds your children together. Keep us in faith in Christ Jesus, in joyful obedience, and in loyalty to Your

infallible Word. Bless Your church everywhere, protect it from all its enemies, and give it success in all the work that believers do in Jesus' name.

We thank You for our Christian homes. Surround every family with the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, that love, peace, forgiveness, comfort, joy, and moral purity may fill their lives. In all problems of life, remind us that You are with us to guide and keep us.

We thank You, Lord, for the blessings that we enjoy in our rich land. Defend it, both within and without, from all who would harm it by sin, undermine it by strife and rebellion, or destroy it by war.

Strengthen the faith of those in our midst who are suffering illness, who are bereaved, and who are lonely, or depressed in any other ways.

We thank You for health and healing, education and social joys, friends and companions, and all the beauties and wonders of Your creation. Fill us with gratitude for Your goodness, and give us opportunities to use what You give us to serve you.

Surround us all with Your love, and finally receive us into perfect, unbroken fellowship with You and our Saviour Jesus Christ. Hear these prayers in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

The Lord's Supper has always been seen as a sign of unity between those who commune together at the Lord's table (1 Cor. 10:17). When Christians partake of the Lord's Supper in a church body that has a confession of faith, they thereby declare that they believe that they are one in faith with those who commune with them. Since people cannot honestly hold two differing confessions at the same time, they cannot honestly commune with those whose confession is in conflict with their own. If any do this nevertheless, they deny their own confession, and so deny Christ Himself (2 Cor. 6:14-18). **We ask visitors who are communicant members in a church not in fellowship with the AELC, or are not familiar with the *AELC Statement of Faith*, to refrain from communing today. If you have questions, please speak with the pastor after service.**

Article: "At least He's Going to Church!"

Have you ever heard someone say that? Usually, it's said by a parent about a child who has joined a different Christian denomination. The conversation goes something like this: "Oh, pastor, you know my son John? Well, as you know, he moved away some time ago. He has since found himself a good Christian girl, and they are getting married. He intends on joining her church. But nevertheless, he was confirmed here. It's a non-denominational church but is

still Christian. While I wish he hadn't left the church he was confirmed in, he did. But at least he is going to church!"

Good news or bad news?

Of course, that depends on the church. But usually, it's "bad news." Why? Today, most denominations and non-denominational churches are following the "*ways of this present world and its spiritual ruler*" (Ephesians 2:1). So, to say, "At least he's going to church" may not be a good thing because of the false doctrine they are being fed.

To help, 1 John 4:1 gives us a good suggestion for church searchers, parents, and godparents in seeking out a faithful church for their "dearly loved." The Apostle John writes, "*Dearly loved people, do not believe every spirit but test the spirits to see whether they are from God! For many false prophets have gone out into the world.*"

Before anyone changes their church affiliation, they ought to "test," investigate, and study what their present church teaches and what the one(s) they are considering really teaches. Joining a church ought not to be an emotional thing but simply answer the question, "Does the church teach what the Bible teaches?"

"Testing the spirits" isn't that hard. Does the church you are considering confess the Nicene Creed as a faithful summary of the Christian faith? There is more than that, but that is a good place to start. If a church avoids the Nicene Creed, that probably means they also deny some basic doctrine of the Christian faith, which should be avoided.

It is sad but true that most people are more inclined to join a church where they are made to feel good rather than a church that emphasises the right doctrine or even the right conduct.

And yet, teaching the right doctrine is exactly what Jesus tells the Apostles to do. He says to teach "*them to observe all that I have commanded you*" (Matthew 28:20). That's doctrine! So, is it good that "at least he's going to a church" or not?

That really depends on what that church teaches. "*Beloved, although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints*" (Jude 1:3).

Children's Message:

I like to read. Do you like to read or to have people read to you? When I was still a child, I remember sometimes when I was reading, there were words that I wouldn't know how to say or what they meant. My mum, dad, or teacher would help me understand. It's a special thing to have people help explain things to us and help us learn new things.

Our First Reading today was from Acts. In that reading, there was a man from a country in Africa, Ethiopia, who was riding along in his chariot. He was reading from the prophet Isaiah, but he didn't understand what it meant. He had an important job, so he was probably very smart, but he probably hadn't had a pastor or dad or mum or lots of friends who knew the Bible and could explain it to him. He was just trying to understand it on his own.

But there was another man - his name was Philip. Philip heard the man reading out loud as he rode along in that chariot. And Philip knew who the man was reading about. Philip said, "You're reading about Jesus! Let me tell you more about Him." Well, they rode along together, and as they went, Philip told the man about how much Jesus loved him and what Jesus did. From that Bible passage the man was reading, Philip especially told him about Jesus dying on the cross for his sins and how he could be forgiven.

That man came to know about Jesus because someone else helped him understand. He was so happy to know about Jesus. He said, "I want to be baptised!" - and he was. And do you know what the man did after that? He told other people, too, and helped them understand things about Jesus.

Our mums or dads, our Sunday School teachers, our pastor, and other people can help us understand the Bible. You can do that for others too! When someone helps us understand the Bible, we learn that the whole book, really, is the story about Jesus and what His dying on the cross and rising again for us means. It means we can go to heaven when we die, and it also means Jesus will be with us, caring for us, every day and every way in the meantime. Always more to learn about that!

*Thank You Jesus for giving me others who have helped me know about You.
May I also let others know of your great love for us! Amen.*

WEEKLY ANNOUNCEMENTS

5 May 6 Easter	9 May (Thursday) Ascension Day	12 May 7 Easter
8.30am OAK HC 9.00am TMBA LR 9.30am AUB LR 10.15am GRN HC 9.00am LOWOOD LR	7.30pm OAK HC	8.30am OAK LR 9.00am TMBA LR 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR 9.00am MARBURG HC (Ascension Day Service)
Sunday, 5 May		
READINGS: Acts 10:44-48;	1 John 5:1-8;	John 15:9-17
HYMNS: 503 322 162 (175 848) 459		
Thursday, 9 May		
READINGS: Acts 1:1-11;	Ephesians 1:15-23;	Luke 24:44-53
HYMNS: 110 169 771 410 291 106		
Sunday, 12 May		
READINGS: DOWNS: Acts 1:12-26; MARBURG: Acts 1:1-11;	1 John 5:9-15; Ephesians 1:15-23;	John 17:11b-19 Luke 24:44-53
HYMNS: Downs: 516 186 494 870 Marburg: 110 169 771 410 291 106		

Wednesday, 1 May, 10.00am. Women's Guild at Lowood. Opening devotion: Jeanette. Choose a Bible verse from Numbers 24-26. Item of interest: Something red.

On the 6th of May, Allen Beutel will be celebrating his 90th Birthday. Allen's family would like to invite everyone to join them to celebrate this blessed milestone with a luncheon next **Sunday, the 5th of May**, at Bethlehem Toowoomba, starting at midday. Please bring a plate to share and something sweet for dessert.

Saturday, 11 May, 7.30pm. Youth at Bethlehem Toowoomba. Please bring something for supper.