

Lectionary Texts for April 28, 2024 • *Fifth Sunday of Easter* - Year B
Acts 8:26-40 • Psalm 22:25-31 • 1 John 4:7-21 • John 15:1-8



John 15:1-8

Christ the Vine, 1400-1450, by Angelos Akotantos, Greek, 1390 - 1457

Icon

Vrontisiou Monastery, Heraklion, Crete

Continued

Less familiar than *The Tree of Jesse*, which depicts the lineage of Jesus, *Christ the Vine* was painted when the collapse of the Byzantine Empire was imminent, which led to a contentious Church council in the cities of Ferrara and Florence (c. 1438-1445) where leaders worked to unify the Eastern and the Western Church. Christ, with extended arms, is seated in the trunk of the tree, suggesting his centrality. The open book in front of him has excerpts from John 15. Peter and Paul, perhaps representing the East and West branches of the church, are positioned at the top, on either side of Christ. The four evangelists are next, two on each side. The remaining apostles also hold open books and scrolls. The hanging fruit symbolizes the continuation of the faithful – as they abide in Christ so too he abides in them (John 15:4).

The subtle reference to *The Tree of Jesse* suggests another layer of unity, not only between the branches of the divided Church, but also between the Church and Israel, between the Old and the New Testaments.

Angelos Akotantos was a Greek painter, educator, and cantor. Fifty extant paintings are attributed to him, 30 of which have his signature. Relatively wealthy, much of the information about him comes from his will which he composed in 1436. One of the most important Greek painters of the first half of the 15th century, he supplied icons to Greek churches and monasteries on Crete, Patmos, Rhodes, and elsewhere. His works were extremely popular; his style was copied by many icon painters, and copies of his icons can be found in churches and private collections all over the world.

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Acts 8:26-40

Then 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.

Psalm 22:25-31

From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him.

For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.

To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him.

Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

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.

John 15:1-8

"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.