

April 28, 2024
The Fifth Sunday of Easter
First Communion Sunday
Acts 8:26-40
John 15:1-8
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

Busy Kids

Yesterday afternoon and evening we had our final First Communion preparation activities.

The first thing we did yesterday was have the First Communion Event, when the First Communion kids:

- baked the bread that we will use for Holy Communion today,
- read a book about Holy Communion,
- played a game to remind them that there's a place for everyone at God's table,
- toured the sacristy and learned about how the communion meal is prepared at our church,
- sampled unconsecrated wafers and wine,
- and practiced and performed skits of Bible stories related to Holy Communion.

After that we had the Celebration Potluck Dinner, when the First Communicants, their families, and other people from Emmanuel got together to share a meal as a reminder of the many meals of fellowship that Jesus ate with people as a sign of his ministry of love for all.

Before all that, during the month of March, the First Communicants had four Saturday morning classes during which they learned about the meaning of Holy Communion. During those four sessions the kids learned that Jesus gives us this

special meal. They learned that Jesus is with us in communion. They learned that Jesus cares for us. They learned that Jesus offers enough for all.

During those March sessions and during yesterday's activities, I have had a chance to get to know the kids better and here is something that stands out for me about these kids. They are busy!

In the four children who will be receiving Holy Communion today, Bear, Lily, Parker, and Ellie, we have an actor, a baseball player, two cub scouts, three basketball players, two soccer players, a hockey player, and a lacrosse player. There's probably more stuff that they're involved in that I don't even know about. These kids are busy. Their parents and families are busy; they are people who are on the go most of the time.

When the kids arrived for the First Communion event yesterday, some of them were tired. They had already had a long day, a cub scout Jamboree, a performance of Charlotte's Web, and they were looking ahead to almost four more hours of activity before they headed for home around 7:30 where they, no doubt, crashed into their beds, if they didn't fall asleep on their way home.

When was the last time you heard an eight-year-old say, at 4:30 in the afternoon. "I'm really tired. I need to sit down,"?

Usually, you only hear that when the eight-year-old in question is sick, but the eight-year-old in this case was just tired. It had already been a long day.

These kids young as they are, have busy and full lives. And I'm guessing that their parents might have wondered, as they were putting together the jigsaw puzzle that was their calendar yesterday (Who needs to be where, when? Who's driving who where?) might have wondered if their busy kids really needed one more thing to do.

You know who else had a full life? The Ethiopian eunuch who we heard about in our reading from Acts for today, traveling home, back to Ethiopia, from

Jerusalem. A long journey. He was traveling home from Jerusalem, where he had probably been to celebrate one of the Jewish festivals.

Often when I preach about this story, from the book of Acts, or when this story is talked about or taught, a lot of focus is placed on the fact that this man, this Ethiopian, is a eunuch, and, because of that prevented from full participation in Jewish life. But instead of focusing on that today, on what this man didn't have, on what he wasn't allowed to do, I want to focus on what he could and did do. Because this man was busy, successful, accomplished, important.

You don't find yourself traveling in style from Jerusalem to Ethiopia, riding in your own chariot, unless you're a pretty successful person.

And while he was being driven in his chariot, the Ethiopian eunuch was reading the Bible, reading from the scroll of Isaiah. Because of that we know that not only was this man educated, literate, something that not many people in his time were, but also, that he had access to enough money to be in possession of a scroll. At that time the written word was exceptionally expensive to make and so, a private citizen actually having a scroll to read that he was comfortable pulling out in his chariot means that this was a man of extraordinary means.

The reading from Acts tells us that this man was a court official of the queen of the Ethiopians, and in charge of her entire treasury. Imagine the responsibilities that this man had, collecting taxes for the queen, keeping the proceeds safe, dispensing money from the queen's treasury and being able to give an accounting of it all. Talk about busy.

This was a man, who had a lot going for him. He had wealth at his command, he had responsibility, he had the trust of the queen, he probably had the respect, by virtue of his position, of those who worked for him. And yet, as he was reading from the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, while he was traveling home from worship, it seems that he felt that something was missing in his life. Because when Philip, sent by the Holy Spirit, came alongside his chariot, heard him reading from Isaiah, and

asked him if he understood what he was reading, the Ethiopian eunuch had questions. He said to Philip, “How can I understand, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get into his chariot and sit beside him.

Once they were together, Philip talked about the passage of Isaiah that the Ethiopian eunuch was reading, a passage from the 57th chapter of Isaiah, and told him how those words of scripture related to Jesus, how Jesus was the lamb, led to the slaughter, who poured himself out and was numbered among the transgressors, who bore the sins of many, and who God had glorified.

Philip must also have told him about the church, the community that God was gathering together, to follow Jesus, a community bound together by the Holy Spirit, by water and word and table fellowship, where everyone, Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, included and excluded were welcome, because the next thing that the Ethiopian eunuch said as they traveled down a desert road was, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” (Acts 8:36)

So, the Ethiopian eunuch, with his busy, successful life, had his chariot driver stop, so that he could enter into the water in the desert and be baptized. Because as full of good things as his life was, he knew he needed something more; a deeper sense of connection with the God he had been in Jerusalem to worship. He wanted something that the world could not give him, a new community, a new relationship, a love that the world could not give, that all of his power and wealth and prestige could not give. And he found it in the waters of baptism.

After his baptism the Ethiopian eunuch went on his way rejoicing, and there is a tradition in the church that says that he was the one who first brought Christianity to Africa, spreading the word about Jesus, and inviting others to be baptized and to join him at the table of fellowship, where they ate bread and drank wine and remembered Jesus and learned to love one another.

As busy, as successful, as wealthy as the Ethiopian eunuch was, there was a God shaped hole in his life that only Jesus could fill and connected to Jesus, he

found peace, he found joy, he found fellowship, not based on his status or his accomplishments, but based solely on God's love for him

And that is what awaits Bear, Lily, Parker, and Ellie, four busy kids, at the communion table. Joy, peace, fellowship, and a welcome that is unconditional.

Because at this table, God doesn't look at us and count how many goals we scored or how loudly the audience clapped or the spectators cheered or how many medals or trophies we've won or how many badges we've earned.

God doesn't look at us and assess our worthiness based on our successes. God also doesn't look at us and count our mistakes or our disappointments. Our invitation to this table isn't based on our successes or our failures. It is based purely and only on the love of God, made known to us in Jesus Christ, who feeds us here.

Jesus, who said, "Come to me all you who are weary and carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28) Because as hard as it might be to imagine, sometimes even busy second graders are weary and carrying heavy burdens. And here, at this table, they will find food and a chance to rest.

Jesus also said, in our gospel reading for today, "I am the vine and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit." (John 15:5)

The vine is what connects a branch to the roots, it is how the branches get fed, where they get their energy; their life.

Jesus is that for us. Jesus is our vine and he feeds us. He gives us energy for our busy lives. He gives us life.

And for all us, busy kids, busy families, busy people, or ones who remember those days; for Bear, Lily, Parker, and Ellie, Jesus, our vine, Jesus, our lamb, Jesus, our rest, Jesus, our food, meets us and welcomes us, feeds us, and gives us life.

Bear, Lily, Parker, and Ellie, Welcome to the Lord's table. Thanks be to God. Amen.