

**Sermon Notes – April 28, 2024**  
**The Holy Gospel of St. John 15: 1-8**  
**Peace Lutheran Church**  
**“How Does the Vine Grow?”**

Hidden in the reading for today is the Trinity named as Vine grower, Vine, and Spirit. The Vine grower, God the Father, is an active agent who removes branches that do not offer life, and who also prunes the fruit-bearing branches. In the Epistle, this Vine grower gives us both love and the Spirit, by sending the Son who is the Vine.

The Vine embodies the identity of the Savior - one to whom the branches are attached, in order to abide in the gifts of the Vine who is a cleansing embodiment. The image of the Vine is not the same kind of active agent as is found in the Vine grower. The Vine is a more stable and settled home for the branches, which then produces good fruit because the Vine grower has done the work of removing and pruning.

The Spirit presents in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian court official when in the form of an angel a messenger instructs Philip to go to a lonely road and find a person who is puzzling over the words of the prophet Isaiah. Philip is to tell him “the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8: 35). Because the book of Acts is considered an extension of the narrative about Jesus as found in the Gospel of Luke, we might find echoes of the Emmaus story in Philip's recounting of Jesus' life.

Note that the one who seeks knowledge and finally asks to be baptized is a eunuch, a person who would not have been admitted to the holy places, despite his high standing in the secular courts of Ethiopia. The account of the one who was denied justice fuels the question this Ethiopian official asks of Philip. Who is this person? The subtext is: Could it be me? And if that is what the eunuch came to understand from Philip's stories about Jesus, the request to be baptized is a natural outcome.

Once you have glimpsed the one who was unjustly executed and then was raised from the dead, you know you are in the company of a power that can so oppose injustice that he “does not open his mouth” (v. 32). God's own self, who can withstand such torment, knows the struggle of this world. This is one the Ethiopian wants near him. Baptized as a result of the Holy Spirit sending a teacher and baptizer to him, he becomes one of the branches whose life is made possible because of the Vine and the Vine grower.