

During the season of Easter, we continue to read from the New Testament. The story from Acts about the treasury official to “the Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians” (8:27) is filled with surprises and faith. Philip, led by an angel to the road leaving Jerusalem runs alongside a chariot. He hears the Ethiopian eunuch reading from a scroll of Isaiah (purchased at a great price). The Ethiopian has made a religious pilgrimage and is leaving Jerusalem. Philip asks the rich official if he understands what he is reading—a question like the question asked the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Philip begins to tell the Good News of Jesus who was betrayed, suffered, died, and rose from the dead, and all are welcomed as children of God. Suddenly, there in the desert, there is water, and the Ethiopian asks to be baptized. As a non-Jew, a person who manages money, and a eunuch, he declares he desires to be a part of the new community through baptism. Philip baptizes him and the Spirit mysterious leads Philip to another place. Rejoicing, the court official continues home, another witness to the Good News. It is a strange tale, testimony to the reality that something is happening in the lives of the people touched by the Good News.

We may ask, “What is the Good News?” How does it make a difference? In 1 John 4:7 *“Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God,”* the emphasis is on the belonging and being a part of community that loves God and loves the people in their lives. Love is not a solitary action in relationship to God, it is an activity of relationship forming community—Beloved Community as Bishop Curry and Martin Luther King, Jr. describe it. *“Those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.”* It is not an easy journey; it is a journey filled with rejoicing.

When Jesus says “I am” the vine, you are the branches, we are being invited into deeper relationship with God as individuals and as community. The desire to share abundantly means growth, not judgement. The part of us as community, and as individuals, which has no life, withers on the branch, and dies; What is dead is trimmed away, renewing the energy of the vine. We are being sent forth as witnesses on this day and this time in the power of the One who loved us first.

Susan+

Messenger By Mary Oliver

My work is loving the world.
Here the sunflowers, there the hummingbird -
equal seekers of sweetness.
Here the quickening yeast; there the blue plums.
Here the clam deep in the speckled sand.

Are my boots old? Is my coat torn?
Am I no longer young and still not half-perfect?
Let me
keep my mind on what matters,
which is my work,

which is mostly standing still and learning to be
astonished.

The phoebe, the delphinium.

The sheep in the pasture, and the pasture.

Which is mostly rejoicing, since all ingredients are
here,

Which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart
and these body-clothes,
a mouth with which to give shouts of joy
to the moth and the wren, to the sleepy dug-up
clam,
telling them all, over and over, how it is
that we live forever.