

3 May 2015 Fifth Sunday after Easter

Acts 8: 26-40
Psalm 22:26-32
1 John 4: 7-21
John 15:1-8



[Easter 5B May 3, 2015 Textweek](#)

What do we discover in our reading of the Scriptures?
What do the readings provide us with and what do they illustrate?

Today's readings offer us a variety that can be summed up in a few lines;

1. *The story of an Ethiopian eunuch*
 2. *A reading from the prophet Isaiah.*
 3. *A proclamation by Philip*
 4. *A psalm of salvation, And then some theological clichés;*
 5. *God is love, 6. The atoning sacrifice for our sins, 7 Love one another*
 8. *Those who abide in love abide in God, 9. Perfect love casts out fear*
- And finally we have the gospel, or good news:*
- 10 *I AM the true vine, 11. You are the branches, 12. Abide in me as I abide in you*

That's a short 12 line summary of what we've been reading today; and probably a list of twelve sermon topics; so I wonder what each of us has heard as we listened to the readings.

Much of the time, many of the readers, or hearers, get very little; and that's true for a variety of reasons, not least the obscurity of some of the texts. Sometimes, we'll encounter confusion, with, or without, the curiosity displayed by the Ethiopian eunuch; and some are put off by the apparent inconsistencies of the readings, and some will simply leave it to others to work out and wait for an acceptable explanation.

Perhaps, we can pause and appreciate that with the variety displayed in our twelve line summary, there is too much to cover in a sermon of a few minutes; and so come back to the initial questions:

What do we discover in our reading of the Scriptures?
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Let's now look at another twelve line selection..

1. A bowl of oranges and lemons
2. A carton of eggs
3. A bottle of Noble One botrytis Semillon, one of the most awarded wines in history.
- 4/5. Two different sugars, caster and icing
6. Some mint leaves
7. A bottle of Bardinet French Brandy
8. and some water
- 9/10. Two types of flour, cornflour and plain flour
11. Some cinnamon sticks
12. A carton of milk

If we can picture the items in this list in our minds, we'll see that like the first list it offers little excitement and we're not really sure what it is all about. It could be a shopping list or perhaps the components of a still life painting of a kitchen scene, or even a list of specials – seeing as the list was read in church.

What is really helpful with this list is knowing where it comes from; and it's from a recipe book; and that knowing already helps us make sense of the list, but it is only the ingredients, not the full recipe.

However, the end result we would all readily appreciate if we saw and tasted it; Crepe suzette, a delicious and decadent dessert, the soft light crepe, folded with a delicious citrus sauce perfectly complemented by orange segments lightly caramelised and delicately brandied; served with a small glass of dessert wine, the botrytis Semillon provided a sensual feast of rich white stone fruits, citrus, a touch of marmalade and beautifully integrated oak. A spicy tang of acidity balances the sweetness of this wine giving an alluring freshness to the finish and bringing out the best of flavours in the dessert.

With the taste of this analogy we can look back to the readings as another set of ingredients, and in order to realise their fullness we need to discover what book they are from, and what function they perform.

With the exception of the Psalm, they are all New Testament readings and so they are post-Easter writings speaking to a post-Easter audience, with the first reading referring back to the Old Testament prophet Isaiah.

The 'crepe suzette' of scripture is the realisation of ourselves in the image of God; this is the delicious dish to be enjoyed when the recipe has been followed.

We do however have to be careful, measured, with the various ingredients: for example we read: “*35 Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.*” We’re looking for the good revealed **by** Jesus not the good news ‘about’ Jesus, so perhaps this is the salt and we need only take a pinch.

Is the flour gluten free, a question for the recipe, and we need to ask probing questions also of the scriptures, for example; why an “Ethiopian eunuch”?

Often seeking such answers really brings the scriptures alive:, the “Ethiopian eunuch” represents someone outside of Israel (like us), and his status as a eunuch might signify purity and celibacy, it might refer to his loyalty beyond family for he would have no family of his own nor any in-laws, and it might be an emphasis on the ‘now’ with future generations out of the equation. “*God is love*” seems to be the binding agent, like the eggs, it holds all the ingredients together.

However “*God is love*” and “*God’s love*” are subtly different; and like the two types of flour they need to be used in different ways, for different purposes, they are not the same.

“*I AM the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower.*” and then “*5 I am the vine, you are the branches.*” metaphors within metaphors are far too complicated for a brief sermon; and that leads us to a valuable lesson from the cookbook.

Reading, looking at and listening to the list of ingredients does not give you the taste, or the experience , or the delight of the crepe suzette.

Before we can sample what the ingredients truly offer, we have to get involved; we have to sift some of the ingredients, work with our hands, carefully weigh, blend, stir, discard and also discover the culinary secrets of those who have cooked before, employing techniques that have been treasured and handed down.

When we have done the best we can, in terms of preparation, there is still the process of cooking, and this is the process of transfiguration, the process of resurrection and the process of creation.

Into the tomb of the oven go the raw materials and from the tomb, emerges something quite different and unrecognisable to that which went in.

And then, finally we have the experience of delight.

We all know that cooking for one is a lot of work, and easy to not bother with; but cooking for others is always a delight and something we take delight in doing. So the whole process, both within the metaphor of making crepe suzette, and within the process of understanding the scriptures, is designed for sharing, for giving away to others.

How does the “noble One’ fit into the recipe?

A good crepe suzette deserves a good wine to accompany it and to celebrate the feast; and that is the making of Eucharist, where we get to sample to the dish we are looking to create...

Perhaps we might explore for ourselves what it means to be a post-Easter community, and rather than reading lists of ingredients, let’s all have a go at cooking the book.

Peter Humphris