

#81
August 11, 2019
Mission 1
Acts 8:26-40

As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, "Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candice, the queen of Ethiopia. The eunuch had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and he was now returning. Seated in his carriage, he was reading aloud from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

The Holy Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and walk along beside the carriage."

Philip ran over and heard the man reading from the prophet Isaiah. Philip asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

The man replied, "How can I, unless someone instructs me?" And he urged Philip to come up into the carriage and sit with him.

The passage of Scripture he had been reading was this:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter.
And as a lamb is silent before the shearers,
he did not open his mouth.
He was humiliated and received no justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or someone else?" So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus.

As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look! There's some water! Why can't I be baptized?" He ordered the carriage to stop, and they 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 never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. Meanwhile, Philip found himself farther north at the town of Azotus. He preached the Good News there and in every town along the way until he came to Caesarea.

Mission 1

When I was a pastor in Kybartai, Lithuania, there was a man who made a long journey to the United Methodist Church each Sunday. He would ride a bicycle for about 30 minutes, then he would have to take a 40-minute train ride and then walk about 12 minutes to the church. He was about 65 years old. He would rarely miss worship. He was always there. He would not say much. He would quietly sit in his chair and listen.

The other thing I knew about this man was that he was a most generous giver. Wow. Every time I would see him I would ask myself this question: Would I do it? How many times do we make decisions from the standpoint of how much it fits our convenience? I might consider it as long as it does not require too much out of my comfort zone. If it does not fit my schedule, if it does not fit my style, if it does not please me then am I still willing?

The followers of Jesus Christ in the first century were pushed far out of their comfort zone. Last Sunday we learned from Saul. Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. Saul had an epic conversion as recorded in Acts 9. We will definitely meet Saul again.

Today we will backtrack to chapter 8 before Saul's conversion. I do not want to miss one key person. The followers of Christ had their first argument. To resolve the dispute 7 people were appointed to serve and help with the distributions for widows? One of them was Stephen and the second deacon was Philip.

Chapter 8 begins with Saul ravaging the church in Jerusalem dragging men and women off to prison. As a result, the Christians scattered all over Judea and Samaria. Everywhere they went they continued to talk about Jesus.

What were Jesus' last words before His ascension? "You shall be my witnesses in Judea and Samaria and to the most remote part of the earth." In essence the Christians were being forced out of Jerusalem and into the world. The church of Jesus Christ continued to grow as they continued to be witnesses.

Philip went to Samaria. It is not clear whether this was Philip, the apostle who found the boy with the 5 loaves and 2 fish and who brought the Greeks to Jesus during his Triumphal Entry that Palm Sunday or was it Philip, the deacon chosen and appointed by the church to serve the widows while the apostles continued their ministry of prayer and preaching. Maybe it was yet another Philip.

Philip proclaimed the Messiah to the citizens of Samaria. Many were saved and were baptized. Peter and John came down from Jerusalem and prayed for these new Christians and they received the Holy Spirit. It was time for Philip to move on.



In Today's lesson we meet Philip traveling from Jerusalem to Gaza.

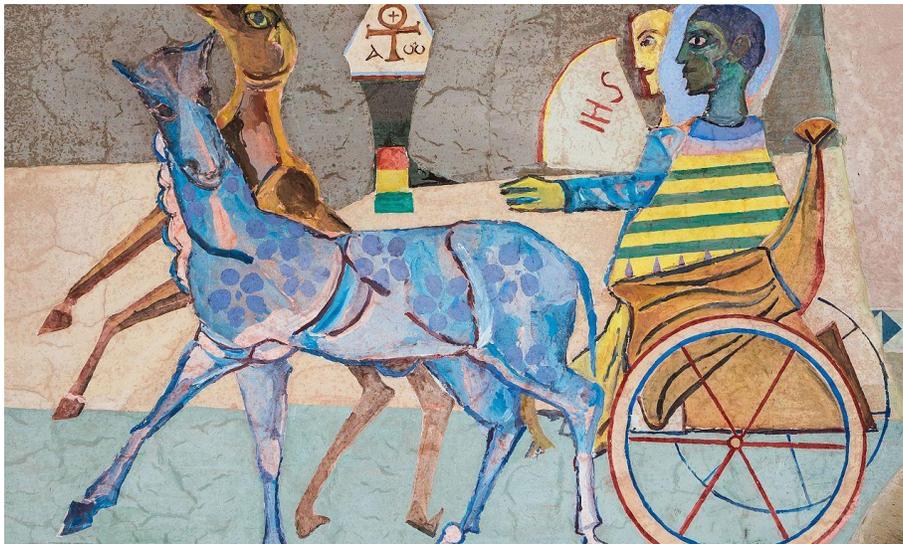
Now God's Spirit is not done and Samaria is not the end of the road. The Spirit of God continues to work, to stretch and lead Philip even further into serving and proclaiming Good News to the end of the world. Do not be afraid to accept new challenges. Do not be afraid to travel into the desert roads. Our faith needs to grow. Stephen and Philip teach us to that to know the power, hope and joy of the Lord we must say "Yes".

"An angel of the Lord said to him, "Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out." You might say, "Good for Philip, because he heard the angel. Easy for him."

First, I do not think it was easy because he was just told to go south. When things go from bad to worse, there is an expression used: "Everything went south from there."

Would it be enough direction for you? How long will I have to travel? Why I am traveling there? When will I be home? I am not sure I would like to travel to the desert by myself. Maybe you would still say: "But he heard from the angel. I do not hear anything – even if I try." Why do we hesitate?

So Philip, with no questions, without delay, got up and went. Who knows what he thought and how long he traveled before he saw the chariot. "I was having success in Samaria and enjoying popularity and now I am walking alone in the hot desert."



In this chariot was a eunuch from Ethiopia. First, you have to think he is an Ethiopian. It means he is African. Second, he is the chief finance minister for queen Candace. Third, he is eunuch. Quite a combination. Above all this he is coming from Jerusalem and he is reading the scrolls from Isaiah. In Acts 8:27 we read that he went to Jerusalem to worship. He traveled over 2,000 miles – about the distance from Fairland to Seattle – at the pace of a horse.

He found something attractive and worth traveling for him to worship the one true God. We know because he was eunuch, he was not able even enter the temple. As a eunuch he was ritually unfit. Just imagine how he felt. He was doomed from the start. He was uniquely disqualified from grace and salvation.

Yet he still searches.

As a little girl I very clearly heard a calling from God. I was so confused and mad that I would not be able to be a priest. How can God give me a calling? I am a woman.

The eunuch did not hear a voice of God or an angel speaking to him. He was even excluded from worship in the temple, but he still searched. He read and studied the Scriptures.

Most of us seldom hear an angel or the voice of God or the Spirit in us telling what to do as it happened to Philip, but we all have the Scriptures. Is it not the voice – the word – of God? Is it not that the place where we learn and listen to the Spirit of God? The Bible is the written word about the Living Word. How many of us live daily truly listening to the words of God? Do we search the Scriptures? Jesus said, “Seek and ye shall find.” Where are you looking for peace, fulfillment and joy?

How many times do we give up and quit? We do not understand so we do not read. How many times do we wish that God would fit in our picture instead of us trying to be part of His story, His mission? We want God to say what we want to hear. We want God to join or, at least, bless our mission and not vice versa.

The eunuch was reading from Isaiah.

**He was oppressed
and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not
His mouth; He was
led as a lamb to
the slaughter, And
as a sheep before
its shearers is silent,
So He opened not
His mouth.**

Isaiah 53:7

What do you imagine the eunuch was thinking while he was reading? About himself? About Isaiah?

So we have Philip walking in the desert and Ethiopian eunuch reading Isaiah. The Spirit told Philip: "Go over and walk along beside the carriage." So Philip ran up to it.



Philip was having great success preaching Jesus to the Samaritans and many were getting saved. But, the Lord sent an angel to tell Philip to leave his successful crusade and chase a chariot in the desert.

Jesus talked about the rejoicing over one lost sheep and the parable of the lost coin.

God sent Philip to travel in the desert to save one person: An African, a eunuch from beyond Egypt and Sudan.

Philip could have had many excuses. Lord, surely you do not want me to run after a chariot in this heat. What will I say? I cannot just come to the stranger. Don't you see these body guards?

When was the last time you shared the gospel with stranger?

Andrew and I were looking for a car. Car dealers have a reputation all over the world. In Lithuania we call it hanging spaghetti on your ears and you even not notice while they do it. We say: "Do not hang spaghetti on my ears."

He was doing his job hanging spaghetti on my ears and I was doing mine. I started to ask about his soul and about his relationship with God. I do not do it nearly not enough. I have received some encouragement lately and I need to just do it. I have entitled this sermon

“Mission 1” because I want to encourage myself and you all to share your faith. Pray and think of one person you will share about your faith. Stop having all the excuses and just do it.

Philip caught up with the chariot and heard the eunuch reading from Isaiah. He asked: Do you understand what you are reading? I love the answer from the man: ‘Nope. Come sit with me and help me.’ Are you humble enough to say, I do not understand. Come sit next to me and explain. Do you have a teachable Spirit?

In September we will start three Bible studies. We had a long break but now it is time to roll up the sleeves, have a teachable spirit and grow together so we can share and make the kingdom of God grow. Please join. We offer three very different Bible studies. I know there is one just right for you or maybe more than one. Let’s humble ourselves and grow together. All the information is inside the bulletin. Sign-up sheets are in the hall as you as you leave the sanctuary. Maybe you would like to start yet another small group. Just do it.

Philip shared the good news about Jesus, beginning with that Scripture. He met the eunuch where he was.



As they rode along, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look! There’s some water! Why can’t I be baptized? Why not now? Why wait?” He ordered the carriage to stop, and they went down into the water, and Philip baptized him”.

Wherever you are in your story, may nobody and nothing keep you from saying “Yes”. “Yes” to sharing the gospel: Saying “Yes” to studying the gospel and saying “Yes” to Communion. Receive fully Christ into your life and offer Christ to others.

The eunuch when on his way rejoicing. Why?

Eunuchs looked and sounded differently than men and women around them. They were single and childless in a world that said you have God's favor if you have children. They were loners without family. They were rejected outsiders. They were mocked by society. They were banned from the temple. There was place for women and gentiles. Where does a gender variant go? In this story he does not even have a name. Frequently sick with brittle bones because of missing hormones his life was really over. He did not even choose this fate.

Surely he could identify with these words in Isaiah.

*He was shamed and was treated unfairly.
He died without children to continue his family.
His life on earth has ended.*

Along comes Philip and starts talking about Jesus. Jesus knows your every problem and can identify with all of your burdens.

The eunuch continues reading and comes to chapter 56 and discovers a most extraordinary promise from God. It is a promise to everyone who feels rejected and left out on the good things in life.

*Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say,
"The Lord will surely separate me from His people."
Nor let the eunuch say, "Behold, I am a dry tree."
For thus says the Lord,
"To the eunuchs who keep My sabbaths,
And choose what pleases Me,
And hold fast My covenant,
To them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial,
And a name better than that of sons and daughters;
I will give them an everlasting name which will not be cut off.*

No wonder he went home rejoicing.

There is a God who loves him. God loves you. Holy communion is a celebration of that infinite love divine, all loves excelling, which lifts us out of despair, worry and depression into joy unspeakable and full of glory.

All means all and God's grace is for all.