

2018-04-29 - Year B - Easter 5 - The Rev. Christopher M. Klukas
Acts 8:26–40; Psalm 66:1–11; 1 John 3:11–24; John 14:15–21

- There is much that is fascinating about this story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, not least of which is Philip's relocation by the Holy Spirit at the end of the story!
- Equally fascinating is the question of how this powerful Ethiopian eunuch came to be worshipping in Jerusalem and in possession of a scroll of Isaiah's writings.
 - Most likely not Jewish
 - Eunuch's were entirely excluded from the assembly of the Lord (Deuteronomy 23:1), though there was hope for a future day Isaiah 56:3-7.
- This story is about demonstrating that this day has come, that all are now welcome, that all now have access to God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ if they will put their faith in him.
- And this is still true today, the Love of God is for all people, all are welcome to accept his invitation to grace, all are welcome to be included in the embrace of the Father.
- But how will they know about this free gift that is being offered? Someone needs to tell them about it.
- Some people read their way into the faith, some think their way into the faith, but almost everyone, at some point in their journey, has another Christian share the faith with them.
- Think for a moment about the person, or people, who shared the faith with you.

Evangelism Must be God-Directed

- This story begins with a clear message to Philip to go and do something strange. v. 26.
- God also gives Philip a clear instruction in v. 29. "Go over and join this chariot."
 - God was telling Philip to go and interrupt a clearly powerful person.
- Philip is willing to do these things because he was used to listening to and obeying God's voice. Acts 8:6-7 Philip couldn't have done these things without God's guidance.
- This is particularly important to remember in the case of evangelism because we cannot ever bring someone to faith in our own strength.
- "*No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.*" (John 6:44, ESV)
- If someone seems resistant to hearing about the Gospel, pray for more opportunities to share with that person, and pray that God would make his or her heart receptive.

Evangelism Often begins with a Person's Felt Needs

- Philip doesn't presume to know what the eunuch needs to hear. Instead he observes him reading from Isaiah and then asks a question (v. 30).
- The Eunuch, at that moment, was wondering about the meaning of this difficult passage from Isaiah about the suffering servant.
- Philip uses this passage as a launching point to tell him all about Jesus (v. 35).

- We don't know exactly what he said, but it must have been comprehensive enough to encompass the whole of the Gospel message and explain that the proper response to this Gospel is faith and Baptism.
- The person whom God has put on your heart may be very close to understanding and accepting the Gospel, or they may be very far away. Your starting place will be different depending on where they are in that journey.
 - The eunuch needed instruction in Isaiah. Your person might need companionship, or food, or hope, or help moving into a new house.
 - Whatever it is, listen to the voice of the person and listen to the voice of the Spirit at the same time and God will make it clear what you should do.
- While your starting place will be different, the ending place is always the same. Jesus.
- N. T. Wright "...wherever you go, whatever culture you come to, whatever situation of human need, sin, exclusion or oppression you may find, the message of Jesus as the one in whom all the promises of God find their 'Yes!' (2 Corinthians 1:20) is there to meet that need."¹

Evangelism Must be Grounded in God's Word

- Philip's evangelism with this eunuch is thoroughly grounded in the Scriptures. It is reasonable to say that the eunuch came to faith through Bible study.
- For some people, they may not be ready to engage with God's word, but they may be very ready to hear your testimony. Maybe you have been through a similar situation with God's help.
- At some point, however, you need to bring the scriptures in because the faith is not just something you thought up! The faith has been revealed to us through God's word.
- Romans 10:14, 17 - everyone needs someone to preach to them, but ultimately "faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ."
- You can help this along by memorizing verses of scripture and by daily reading and meditating on the scriptures. But please don't feel like you don't know the scriptures well enough to share the Gospel. You can always tell someone that you don't know the answer to their question and use this as an opportunity to follow up later.

Conclusion

- Once the eunuch had been baptized, Philip was carried away by the Spirit and the eunuch saw him no more (v. 39).
- This short interaction changed not only one life, but a whole culture!
- The Ethiopian eunuch, by tradition, is the one who first brought Christianity into Ethiopia and is at the roots of coptic Christianity.
- When you evangelize, you never know what role that person will play in the kingdom in the future!

¹ Tom Wright, Acts for Everyone, Part 1: Chapters 1-12 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2008), 136.