

Get Up and Go!



SERMON NOTES JULY 28, 2024

10th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture: Acts 8:26-40

ACTS 8:26-40 (NRSV)

²⁶Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." ³⁰So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³²Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

³³In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth."

³⁴The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" ³⁸He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

The Holy Spirit is still moving persons to serve God and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with those who are "out-there" on the margins, those seeking God, and those who are least, last and lost!

I. GOING BOLDLY!

- A. We first hear of Philip in chapter six of Acts as one of the seven chosen from among the Hellenists (Greeks) and Hebrews, "men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom" appointed by the Apostles in Jerusalem to the task of serving the needs of the community, especially "the daily distribution of food to the widows".
- B. But the Holy Spirit has other service for Philip as he later goes into Samaria (among those despised by the Jews) and proclaims Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 8:4). He proclaims his message with such passion accompanied with exorcisms and healings that great crowds respond and "there is great joy in that city!" (Act 8:8). People believed through Philip's preaching the Good News of the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ and were baptized. Philip is sent among those on the margins, the outcasts, and those seen as unclean by their religion and sets the tone for how God will work through him!
- C. An angel of the Lord then commands Philip to "Get up, and to toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, a wilderness road." Philip is obedient even to this seemingly absurd order from the Lord and finds himself alongside a most unlikely and exotic person whom the Spirit prods him to join on the journey.

Have you experienced
God's call to bring
Good News to someone?
Did you answer the call?

II. WHERE NO ONE HAS GONE!

- A. Philip is led by the Spirit to meet an Ethiopian eunuch, a powerful man in the court of the Ethiopian Queen Candace who is returning home by chariot having been to Jerusalem to worship. This man's religious designation isn't clear from Luke's telling but he shows himself to be a spiritual pilgrim, a faithful God-seeker and proselyte who is seeking to understand Scripture's prophecies and God's salvation.
- B. This Ethiopian (black according to Scripture) man is also a "eunuch" (meaning that he has been castrated to serve in a royal court). Hearing that he has been to Jerusalem to worship reveals the great tension in this encounter. This man would have been excluded from the Temple (Deuteronomy 23:1) and worship because of his sexual status and thus his pious pilgrimage to worship would have been a cause for a further theological crisis.
- C. This faithful man seeking "to know God's purposes more fully has been excluded from the very religious community whose resources would illumine his quest (New Interpreter's Bible Commentary)." It is into this journey and crisis of faith that the Holy Spirit leads Philip to intrude into his reading of the Prophet Isaiah and offer his help in understanding what this learned man is reading.
- D. Philip then interprets Isaiah 53:7-8 as the Ethiopian asks, "About whom.... does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else" which provides Philip the perfect segue to share how Jesus is the one about whom the prophet is speaking and how Jesus' sacrifice is the Good News of grace, forgiveness and salvation! Perhaps the "Eunuch's identification with the humiliated Servant (Jesus) leads him to hope for a different future that the one consigned to him by official Israel (The New Interpreter's Bible Commentary)."

III. BEFORE AND AFTER!

- A. The Ethiopian's invitation to join beside him in the chariot is a gracious act of hospitality that allows Philip to come alongside him as a mentor and teacher. From this encounter and their discussion, the man's life is forever transformed by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit working in and through Philip to reveal Jesus Christ to him.
- B. As they come to a body of water, he asks Philip if there is anything to prevent him from being baptized (a public profession of his faith and acceptance into the followers of Jesus). With no words, only actions, the two men enter the water and Philip baptizes him.
- C. The Spirit then moves powerfully in both their lives as Philip is miraculously whisked away to Azotus (20 miles north) where he continues to proclaim Jesus Christ as messiah and the Ethiopian continues his way home "rejoicing" at his newly given acceptance and salvation!

How does this encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian challenge us to move "outside the box" to offer the Good News of Jesus to persons whom we might ordinarily ignore or avoid?

How is the Spirit calling you to be receptive to God's call, move beyond your comfort zone, and into the unknown to share and experience the wonder of God's Good News?