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St. Paul's Lutheran Church

2100 16th Street SW

Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels

Sermon preached on

April 28:2024

(Previously preached on May 6, 2018)

5th Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: 1 John 3:18-24, John 15:1-8

Hymns: 411:1-5; 384; 360; 283

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Acts 8:26-40

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying, "Arise and go toward the south along the road which goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is desert. ²⁷ So he arose and went. And behold, a man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace the queen of the Ethiopians, who had charge of all her treasury, and had come to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ was returning. And sitting in his chariot, he was reading Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go near and overtake this chariot."

³⁰ So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² The place in the Scripture which he read was this:

"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer *is* silent,
So He opened not His mouth.

³³ In His humiliation His justice was taken away,
And who will declare His generation?
For His life is taken from the earth."

³⁴ So the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I ask you, of whom does the prophet say this, of himself or of some other man?"

³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him.

³⁶ Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, “See, *here is water*. What hinders me from being baptized?”

³⁷ Then Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”

³⁸ So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. ³⁹ Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip was found at Azotus. And passing through, he preached in all the cities till he came to Caesarea.

(NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

This is a familiar enough Scriptural account about which most if not all of us know the basic facts of what happened along that road in the wilderness area south of Judea. But do we? Some of the background and the back story is also very important. For example, who was this man named Philip? The simple answer was that he was one of the seven deacons chosen to assist the apostles in the Jerusalem congregation. The area of his calling was specifically to minister to the needs of the poor within the congregation so that the apostles could focus on preaching the gospel. It was not long however before it was evident that the Holy Spirit blessed Philip with an enthusiasm for the gospel as he boldly witnessed to the truth of Jesus. Because of the persecution conducted by Saul, Philip and many others were forced to leave Jerusalem, being scattered abroad. However, that did not silence them.

Immediately before the events of our text we are told about Philip’s work in the city of Samaria where many believed the gospel Philip boldly proclaimed among them. When reports of this success of the gospel reached the apostles, Peter and John were sent to join Philip in Samaria.

With all this going on in Samaria and so many coming to faith, an angel directed Philip to leave Samaria, and go down south a long distance away from Samaria, south of Judea, into the wilderness area of Gaza where almost no one would be found. The Lord directed Philip to this area, to **walk** all those miles, to the middle of nowhere, to position Philip for this encounter with **one** man. And so we see -

THEME: God's Grace Revealed Out in a Wilderness.

The first item of note for us is that God's grace in the wilderness of Gaza is still --

I. Revealed through the Word.

What may have appeared to be a chance encounter in the eyes of man was no chance encounter at all. Philip was placed where he was so that he could engage this man from Ethiopia. When this man's chariot passed by, Philip was instructed by the Spirit to make the encounter. Philip heard the man reading from the Scriptures, and not just any scripture! The eunuch, who was an important official in the court of the queen of Ethiopia, was reading from Isaiah 53. That wondrous chapter expounds in prophecy the sufferings of Jesus as the Servant of the Lord.

The Spirit provided the perfect setup for Philip. Philip asked the man if he understood what he was reading, and his reply was, "not unless someone guides me." Philip was more than ready to explain the wonder of grace that was revealed in this scripture:

*"He was led as a sheep to the slaughter;
And as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
So He opened not His mouth."* (Isaiah 53:7)

In the church in our day there is so much emphasis placed on programs and activities and organizations and political action committees that many, far too many, have lost sight of the source of revelation of God's grace to us. When it comes to really conquering the darkness and the evil in this world we need the Word of God. The darkness within the heart of men can only be dispelled by the light of life which is revealed to us in the gospel.

It is as Paul wrote, “*So then faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God.*”

(Romans 10:17)

Of course, what we see demonstrated in our text is that the Lord reveals the gospel for salvation. That gospel is found not only in the New Testament writings of the Apostles and Evangelists, but also in the writings of Moses and the Prophets. Indeed, it is a special assurance of God’s grace and salvation to see the gospel promise revealed in the Old Testament in such detail, and then fulfilled by Christ.

So it was with the Ethiopian eunuch. As he read from the Prophet Isaiah the Ethiopian struggled with identifying who this Servant of the Lord could be. He was willing, even eager to have this Scripture explained for him. And that is where we see Philip’s role appointed to him by the Holy Spirit.

While it was an angel that came to Philip and directed him to leave Samaria and to travel so many miles to the Gaza wilderness, it was not God’s desire that an angel explain the gospel to another human being. The Lord has reserved this as a special privilege that the gospel be --

II. Shared by Us Believers.

Beginning at that Scripture Philip taught the man about Jesus. Philip seized the opportunity as the Spirit had instructed him, and shared what he knew about Jesus. Yes, Philip had to know the Scriptures to do this; he had to know that the Old Testament prophecies direct us to Jesus. Philip had to understand how the Scriptures are fulfilled in Jesus. The Apostle Paul emphasized this fact when confirming the faith of the Christians in Corinth, a gentile congregation. The Old Testament Scriptures find their fulfillment in Jesus. Listen to Paul’s words: “*Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, ²by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*” ³*For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins **according to the Scriptures**, ⁴and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day **according to the Scriptures.**”*

Neither Paul nor Philip were devising the gospel as they went along. They presented the truth that God the Holy Spirit had placed in their hands with the Bible, which they then proclaimed to sinners, not only of the Jews, but also to the gentile nations, that this glorious gospel of a crucified and risen and ever-living Lord might go forth to all the world. It goes “from faith to faith,” (Romans 1:16) from believer to believer, as the children of God “*proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.*”

(1 Peter 2:9)

And that, my friends, is what the Spirit asks of us as well. We don't have to speak to large crowds. The Lord cares very deeply about *individual* souls. You might say we don't often run into people reading the Bible as we walk along in life. But then maybe we could be the one seen or heard reading our Bible. There is a famous actor named Denzel Washington who is known for reading his Bible, wherever he is. While it is unfortunate that not all his acting depicts Christ-like characters, he has been repeatedly asked about his Bible reading. So will we, if we but let our light shine. If we let our light shine in whatever way, people will notice. Some will persecute, even as Philip was persecuted, but others will ask, “What does all this mean?” And then you also may tell someone what the Bible says about Jesus. We need to know the Scriptures to do that. We need to spend time in our Bible to know the Scriptures and all they teach us about Jesus.

Yes, we may live in a spiritual wilderness, but the “**not** so chance encounter” will come. I say “**not** so chance encounter” for while it may appear to be by chance to others, and maybe even to us. The Lord sets opportunities before us time and again. We need only open our mouths and speak the Word of truth. May we be ready to share the grace of a forgiving God!

What often keeps us from speaking is that we are unsure of ourselves, or we may judge that this other person will not understand. But that is not our role. We need only speak of the things that we have heard and know to be true, understanding that our words will be –

III. Blessed by the Holy Spirit.

Surely our text brings us that assurance. We don't know how long Philip traveled with this Ethiopian man talking about Jesus. It could have been for quite some miles. We do know the fruits of Philip's testimony. The Spirit worked faith in the heart of the Ethiopian. When they passed a pool of water the Ethiopian expressed his desire to be baptized. He believed, and desired that blessed sacrament that Jesus has commanded for His people to bring them the blessings of salvation. Philip was happy to comply.

Then again, we see the fruit of the Spirit in the joy that filled the Ethiopian's heart having received the blessings of Baptism. As they came out of the water the Spirit removed Philip, caught him away and he was found preaching the gospel in a place called Azotus. Yes, Philip's work with the Ethiopian was finished, but his mission as a child of God continued. As for the Ethiopian, "*He went on his way rejoicing.*" (v.39) His way was the way back to Ethiopia where he lived and served the queen, but now he was a changed man. He was born again of water and the Spirit of God. He was carrying the gospel of Jesus as our crucified and risen Redeemer to others in his homeland.

This is all because of the marvelous and powerful working of the Holy Spirit who works through the gospel, the simple gospel that we hold so dear in our hearts. It's not so hard to share with others that Jesus loves us and Jesus calls us to repentance and life. Jesus takes our sins away, having carried them to the cross. Jesus lives for us and makes intercession for us before the throne of God. We have life and salvation in His name.

When that message is shared with one other, and is then blessed by the Spirit, it doesn't stop there. There is this thing people call the butterfly effect. The tiniest air currents caused by the flapping of the wings of the butterfly carry on and make an impact that we may never fully comprehend. I don't know about that, but that is true with the words of testimony of the child of God as they are directed and blessed by the power of the Holy Spirit! Philip had no idea how far his words of testimony went with the Ethiopian, but it is hard to imagine that they stopped with him. It is cause for a party in heaven when **one** sinner repents! But don't you think that

his rejoicing in the gospel was noticed by others, and that he too then shared this joy with others? That also is the Spirit's blessing.

That blessing of the Spirit of our God accompanies us, and our words of testimony. It is to this that we also have been called. Philip was just another man, first called to faith, and then called to testify, and the Spirit worked through his words of faith. So each of us also have been called to believe, and then also to speak, and the Spirit has given us the message of Jesus our crucified and risen Savior to share, and the Spirit will bless that message.

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)