**May 2, 2021 Acts 8:26-40**

 ***An Angel, An Evangelist, and a Eunuch***

**Scripture:** Acts 8:26-40 NRSV

*(26)Then 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.) (27)So 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 (28)and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. (29)Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." (30)So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (31)He replied, " How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. (32)Now 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. (33)In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." (34)The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" (35)Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. (36)As 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?" (38)He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. (39)When 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. (40)But 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*

**Notes:**

*And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria. (Acts 8:1 NRSV)”*

1. Philip, along with other disciples, travels to ***Samaria***.
	1. An angel of the Lord, instructs Philip to head south, where Philip ***encounters*** a man in a chariot.
	2. Ethiopians are people from the ***edge*** of the ***world***.

*I B “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8 NRSV)”*

1. This ***Ethiopian*** is a most unlikely character reading Isaiah.
	1. The man is a ***eunuch***.

*II A “No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 23:1 NRSV)*”

* 1. The Eunuch is an ***official*** for the Queen of Ethiopia.
	2. The Eunuch was ***worshipping***.
	3. The Eunuch is ***wealthy***.
1. Philip not only went right away but ***ran*** to it.
	1. God gives us ***opportunity*** to be a part of His plan.

*III A Matthew 28, says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20 NRSV)”*

* 1. ***Lead*** others to Christ, we are called to make disciples.
	2. ***Live*** life according to the commandments God gave.

*IV You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:5 NRSV)”*

* 1. Set the ***example*** of a Christian life that all will see.

*IV A “But in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you. (1 Peter 3:15 NRSV)*”

* 1. ***Share*** what the Lord has done for you, and why you have hope in Jesus as Savior.
	2. Be ready to lead them into a prayer of ***repentance***.
1. People are ***searching*** for a way back to God.
	1. Be the hands and feet of Jesus; and ***lead*** the lost to Christ.
	2. Be God’s ***representative***.
	3. ***Love*** the lost, and ***listen*** to the Holy Spirit.

**Script:**

I wonder if there was ever a time when you felt somebody did not deserve the salvation we spoke of last week. I know as a younger person, there were times when my judgmental self would have denied God’s saving grace to a slew of people. However, my attitude was what was keeping me from experiencing God’s full measure of grace and mercy.

Oh, I understand we all have those moments when we feel others are undeserving. We all have those moments when we feel it is unfair for the vilest offenders to be given reprieve from the commands of God. And yet, here we are today feeling fortunate that we were able to receive the very same reprieve.

Well today we will be looking at one of the most unlikely persons to receive God’s grace. A man from the outermost areas of the known world, who has traveled on a journey that brought him into Jerusalem at the same time the Church of Jesus Christ is being spread out throughout the world. Turn with me to Acts 8:26-40 and stand with me as we share in the story of an Angel, an Evangelist, and a Eunich.

*(26)Then 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.) (27)So 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 (28)and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. (29)Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." (30)So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" (31)He replied, " How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. (32)Now 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. (33)In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." (34)The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" (35)Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. (36)As 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?" (38)He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. (39)When 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. (40)But 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.* Acts 8:26-40 NRSV

We have spent the last weeks traveling through the book of Acts. We have seen the transformation brought onto Peter and John but the other disciples have also been a part of this transformation. All of the disciples who were present when the Holy Spirit entered the scene on Pentecost have been a part of this ministry and movement. Peter and John were not the only disciples out there preaching the word and making converts.

We have seen how the authorities in power have been trying to silence this movement and bring it to an end with threats and arrests. The persecution of these people, not just the 11 remaining disciples, but even the 8000 converts that have been made are being pressured. They move from the cities into the countryside; when the pressure increases, they move from the countryside into other regions. Like the concentric circle of waves spreading out from where an object enters the water, so the Holy Spirit is moving this band of believers. And, along the way these people are sharing the story of Jesus.

In today’s passage we follow a section talking about these persecutions. In chapter 7 Luke tells us the story of Stephen and his persecution and martyrdom. How his bold words provoked the crowd to drag him out to the edge of town and stone him. How a young Pharisee named Saul takes on the task of pursuing this group of believers and followers of Jesus teaching, *“And Saul approved of their killing him. That day a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria. (Acts 8:1 NRSV)”*

Philip, along with other disciples, travels to Samaria where he finds success in sharing the Gospel of Jesus. He brings many to salvation in Jesus’ name. People were healed, demons were exorcised from the victims, and many were baptized. There is even mention of a magician who comes to saving knowledge of Christ.

This is where we enter our passage for today. An angel of the Lord, comes to Philip and instructs him to head south on the road to Gaza. This is a desert road, traveling through the wilderness. I have read that Gaza had been destroyed over a hundred years earlier. This direction does not make sense to somebody who knows the area; but Philip is obedient and heads off in that direction. Along the way we find our encounter between Philip and this man in a chariot.

This man is probably one of the more colorful characters we will find in the book of Acts. He is a wealthy Ethiopian eunuch. We can assume right away that because he is Ethiopian, that he has very dark skin. Luke’s audience would be fascinated with this Ethiopian. It is a culture that they don’t know very well and that brings a sense of awe when they think of them. Why? Well, the odyssey speaks of the “far-off Ethiopians…the furthermost of men.” Ethiopians are people from an exotic land, the edge of the world. They are people that are from the very edge of the known world. Does this kind of description remind you of anything? If you have read the book of Acts from the beginning you will recognize this from Acts 1:8 where it says, *“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8 NRSV)”*

The disciples have been in Jerusalem, chased out of town into the surrounding region of Judea, and then pushed a little further into Samaria, and now they are reaching the people from the outer ends of the earth in Ethiopia. You can almost taste the story going in this direction now. And to top it all off, this guy wasn’t just from the ends of the earth. He was also a eunuch. This means that somewhere in this man’s life he was neutered. Why is this important? Well Judaism had very specific views on eunuchs, and a lot of it was inspired by a verse in Deuteronomy, “*No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD. (Deuteronomy 23:1 NRSV)*” This means that this man, was not only from the ends of the earth; but, he was forbidden to approach God in the temple, and represented those people who are not welcome in the congregation. They could not take part in the traditions of the Jewish faith.

Now consider this fact; this guy is powerful. He is an important official in charge of money for the Queen of Ethiopia. So here we have a powerful guy from the ends of the earth, who under any normal circumstances could not be part of the people of God. Then, if this isn’t weird enough, what he was doing was even stranger. He was coming back from Jerusalem where he was worshipping. We know he wouldn’t have worshiped like the Jews would normally, he wouldn’t have been allowed to enter the temple. He may have been allowed in the outer courts where the Gentiles were. But that’s about it.

We also know he is wealthy because he can read. The passage says that he is reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. So yes, this is probably the strangest character that Philip could be running into. But really it falls perfectly into where we know this story is going. Luke has set it up perfectly. He shows us the most unlikely of characters to be on the road at this time; reading from Isaiah. We need to keep these facts in mind as we move on.

So the Spirit continues to guide Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” Philip not only went right away but it says he rand over to it, where he heard the man reading. Recognizing the words of Isaiah 53, he asks, “Do you understand what you are reading?” The eunuch replies, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” and with that he invites Philip to join him and explain the scripture to him. The eunuch already had an understanding of the Jewish story of God and his people but he didn’t understand what this was about. This gives us a brief look into how people would have been reading the prophets at this time. They would have read Isaiah very differently that we read it now. You see we read Isaiah as a book of prophecy, a book that was telling the Jews that their messiah was coming and was going to save the world. We don’t understand most of it still, but we see it as this book of weird poetry that is pointing to Jesus. And with that Philip begins to explain not only the passage but also that this passage refers to Jesus. Philip goes on to explain the Gospel message to him. The Eunuch hears, understands and believes, The eunuch, seeing water close by, says baptize me. He was excited, eager, and very willing to become a part of a church community after being closed out for so long.

One of the key characteristics about this story is a lesson in evangelism. This story seems to suggest God is prodding Philip to do one thing after another. Philip only asks one question in the entire story, and God is telling him everything else. Where to go, when to go, what to do. It is the angel that tells him to go down that road, then to go to the chariot. Luke reminds us that it isn’t Philip here that is causing all this to happen, but it is God. God’s plan is going forward and Philip is given the opportunity to join in. It is the same for us, God is giving us an opportunity to be a part of His effort and plan.

I once thought of evangelism as being something only a chosen few were a part of. That the rest of us were responsible for keeping our salvation in tact while the select few evangelists would travel around seeing that as many as possible were being saved. And while this is partially true, it is not, completely. Each and everyone of us are called to be evangelists to some degree. Each and every one of us is responsible for sharing the gospel message. Each and everyone of us not completing God’s plan is we are not sharing His message to those who are lost. And that creates in us a sin of omission.

Each person, in order to be a part of the body of Christ, the church, must lead others to Christ. Matthew 28, says, “*Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20 NRSV)”* It doesn’t say *“Strong biblical teachers are to go and make disciples, Weaker followers of Christ should stay home and focus on not sinning. Ladies should be Sunday school teachers, and Men should be the care takers of the grounds.”* Jesus is saying in this passage that each of us has a calling to make disciples and that if we do not do our part there will be those who will not make it to heaven. I wonder who in your circle of family and friends will be lost eternally because you failed to do your part.

So how do we do this evangelistic effort. It begins by living our life according to the commandments that God gave us. *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. (Deuteronomy 6:5 NRSV)”* By living your life in the right way, we are setting the example of a Christian life that all will see. As they watch us in our walk they will soon be curious into what makes us so content in our life, they will soon investigate, an they may even ask you about it.

That brings about the second step. “…But in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you…(1 Peter 3:15 NRSV)” In other words always be prepared to share what the Lord has done for you and why you have hope in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. If we live it, we must be prepared to defend and explain it. Those who are searching will not all be as easy as this eunuch was to lead to Jesus. We must be persistent, loving, and above all else, willing to stand on your words before them.

We must be ready to lead them into a prayer of repentance, helping them to acknowledge their sinfulness, moving them to recognize that Jesus will forgive the sincere pleas of a repentant believer; and encourage them to invite Jesus to be Lord oof their life. Once this is done, they are ready to be discipled. But you cannot make disciples unless you are willing to disciple them or at least help them contact somebody who is able to do so.

Like the eunuch in this story there are so many people searching for the way back to God. Like Philip in this story, we are called by name, explicitly to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We are called to demonstrate a Godly life, we are called to testify to God’s mercy and grace, and we are called to love the Lord and all of his creation just as He does, and we are called to lead the lost to Christ. And like the angel in this story, we must recognize the voice of the Holy Spirit leading us into situations where we are able to be God’s representative, to those who are lost.

Where do you stand today, if the opportunity arose would you be able to share what the Lord has done in your life, would you be able to tell another person that the Lord loves them and has a desire to be in a good relationship with them? Would you recognize the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to you; its as easy as listening to that still small voice in the back of your mind. Would you be able to love a person who is lost and seeking their way back to Him?

Two weeks ago we talked about repentance and turning away from sin and turning to God. Last week we talked about salvation, and what it takes to be saved from our sin. Today we are being called to make disciples, the evangelistic work of the church. We are called to Love the lost. We are called to lead those who are searching. And we are called to listen to the Holy Spirit. All in the name of making disciples for Jesus Kingdom.

When Elijah was preparing to leave this world, his disciple Elisha asked that he could take up Elijah’s mantle. As Elijah left this world, the Lord allowed Elisha to take up that mantle and continue with Elijah’s work. Today we have the opportunity to take up the mantle of Jesus Christ. Prepare your hearts for the call Jesus has upon your life, a call to be a light in the community where you live; a light in your circle of friends. Today go with the Hymn ***Let thy Mantle Fall on Me*** ringing in your heart and on your lips.