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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
July 13, 2014
5th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Genesis 18:20-33; Matthew 5:7-12
Hymns: 234; 231; 20; 45:1,2 (248:1-3)

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

Sermon Text: Acts 8:26-38

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. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

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

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed.

INTRO: Who was this man named Philip?

We have a tendency to put so many of the people who are introduced to us in the Bible up on a spiritual pedestal as if they have attained such a high spiritual stature, and were such giants of faith that we could never, ever begin to do the things which they did in their lives. Up to a point that is correct. The Holy Spirit did bless the apostles and prophets with gifts which we do not possess. They performed works and miracles which we should not expect to see in our lives. We know that the direct revelation of God has come to an end, and we are not going to be inspired, at least not in the sense that we use for the Holy writers, to add to Holy Scripture. However, we are mistaken if we conclude that our role for life in this world is therefore less spiritual, and that God does not have work for us to fulfill in the advancement of His kingdom here on earth. This is why it becomes important for us to recall the answer to the question “Who was this man named Philip?”

He was **not** one of the apostles. In fact he was elected or set apart from the rest of the congregation for service to the church in Jerusalem specifically because he was not one of the apostles. He was selected to be one of the seven deacons, or elders, of the congregation. He was a layman, a regular member of the congregation in Jerusalem, who was respected by the rest of the congregation and highly thought of for his spiritual life and character. He was selected to apportion fairly the charitable gifts to the poor of the congregation, the widows and orphans. But the Spirit didn't hesitate to use Philip to show others the way to life and salvation, especially after persecution arose in Jerusalem and the members, including Philip and his family, were scattered to different places away from Jerusalem. --

THEME: Philip's Encounter with the Ethiopian Reveals How the Holy Spirit Works in this World.

The first lesson for us to learn is that

I. He Works through Believers.

Granted this was a special intervention in Philip's life that an angel appeared to him and gave him specific instructions to head out to the road that leads to Gaza to the uninhabited region to the south of Judea. Philip didn't really know why he was sent there but the Holy Spirit had His reasons for Philip to be there. The Spirit's reason was revealed when the chariot of an important government official from the country of Ethiopia came down the road. Then the Spirit revealed His intent and instructed Philip to approach the chariot. Philip had to run. That might have made him look odd, or even threatening, but it all worked according to the Spirit's will. He heard the man reading from Isaiah 53, a portion of scripture we sometimes call the passion according to Isaiah. But the eunuch from Ethiopia didn't understand what it was about. He didn't get it. Without knowing Jesus as Savior he was lacking the spiritual insight necessary to comprehend the wonder of grace that is found in that chapter of Isaiah. So when Philip asked if he understood, the Ethiopian man admitted his confusion, and the opportunity for Philip to testify to the truth about Jesus was presented to him, and Philip fulfilled the will of the Spirit for that moment in his life and he began with that Scripture to preach Jesus.

This lay-member of the church was chosen by the Holy Spirit to share his faith in Jesus with a man from a distant land. It was one of the most important moments in Philip's life. Yes, it was only one man, not the hundreds or even thousands addressed by the apostles, but only the Spirit knows what will come from such a **"chance encounter."** You know as well as I do that this was no **"chance encounter."** We know that because the Spirit tells us that right in our text. The Spirit told Philip where to be and when to be there so that this encounter would happen. But it very likely seemed to be a chance encounter to the Ethiopian man. My point is that there are encounters that we have in life that are much more than mere chance. The Holy Spirit directs our lives also. The Holy Spirit brings people into our lives so that we might have the

opportunity, or so that we might **seize** the opportunity to share what we know about Jesus with someone else.

The Lord did **not** call angels to do this work. Although He sent His angels on special occasions to make special announcements regarding the advancement of His holy will, He did not chose them to be the messengers of the gospel to the world. **He choose us**, His children, the believers within His Church militant, those of us still living in this world, to be the messengers of His grace to a fallen world. Jesus told His disciples:

Matthew 5:14-15 “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

This is our purpose in the world. We are the disciples of Jesus living now in this world. And indeed there is a lot of darkness in the world. Our light should not be covered and hidden. We are to shine so as to give light to all who are in the house, **all who are around us in this world**. That sounds intimidating for us. We are so sure that we don’t know enough. The answer for that is for us to stay in the Word.

If you know people who are spiritually confused and wandering in the darkness of human reason and the relative morality of this world, if you care about these people in your life, then know the Holy Spirit has brought you together, and the Holy Spirit will give you the opportunity to let your light shine, for others to know that the truth of Christ lives in your heart. The Holy Spirit will, according to His gracious will, give you the opportunity to speak the truth in love. Before we object and say, “**I can’t, I don’t know what to say or how to say it,**” recall the words of Paul to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 2:12-14 “Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. 13 These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. 14 But the natural man does not receive the things of the

Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.”

We do know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we speak. We don't try to outsmart the world with the wisdom of the world, but we speak according to the Spirit, as He leads us. Then we pray, and we trust the Holy Spirit to open hearts and change hearts according to His will.

II. The Spirit Works through the Means of Grace.

Let's return to that scene described for us in our text. What did Philip say? He began at that Scripture to **preach Jesus!** He told the Ethiopian how Jesus went without complaint to the cross, and bore our sins in His own body. He told Him how Jesus was cursed by God as He suffered, and how He died the death sentence we deserved. He told the Ethiopian how Jesus rose to life again, and how we have the hope of resurrection in a crucified but risen and living Savior. Philip got to the heart of the gospel. That is what the Ethiopian needed to hear, and the Spirit worked powerfully in his heart as he heard it. The Spirit of God works through the means of grace, which is the gospel.

That is what we need to remember. We can wish all we want to that someone we care about will come to faith, but the key to that happening isn't in our *wishing* for it, it is in our *testimony* regarding the gospel of Jesus Christ. People are caught up in the idea that the surety of salvation is found in the things that we do. Even in many Christian churches the message of living a good life predominates to such an extent that people walk away without a clear understanding that the key to our salvation is found completely in what Christ has done for us. Tell people you know and love, as well as the stranger you meet in the not so “chance encounter” the Spirit brings into your life, “**Jesus takes our sins away!**” Make it clear that it was Jesus who paid the price, the entire price of our salvation, and it is Jesus' righteous and holy life which is credited to us that opens heaven's doors!

You can do that! I know you can do that because the Spirit lives within your heart also, and the Spirit will open your lips to testify

to the gospel of Christ, and the Spirit will accompany your words with His sanctifying power. You will rejoice at the results.

Wondrous results were evident in the heart of the Ethiopian man too. Even as Philip was riding with him in his chariot they came upon a body of water along the side of the road, and the Ethiopian man expressed his faith in his desire to be baptized. He already was a student of Holy Scripture, and surely as Philip taught him from the Scriptures it all came together according to the Spirit's blessing. It is evident that Philip had discussed the Savior's command to baptize, and the blessings that came with baptism. The Ethiopian desired that blessing in his life also, and confessing his faith in Jesus as his Lord and Savior he was baptized.

The Spirit not only led the Ethiopian to desire baptism, the Spirit worked through that baptism. **“Baptism is a washing of regeneration and a renewing of the Holy Spirit.”** Baptism brings us even closer to Jesus as we share in His death that we might rise again to a new life.

Today so many wrongly think that the power for a good life starts in us and in our will, in our good intentions. It is in fact a fruit of the Spirit of our God. He uses our baptism as a power in our lives that we might live to the praise and glory of our Redeemer Lord. Paul's words to the Romans are very much to this point of finding the power of the Christian life in the Spirit's working in baptism.

Romans 6:3-4, 12-13 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. ... 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.

The Spirit continues to work through the means of grace which is the gospel in Word and sacrament. It isn't just symbolism, it is a spiritual reality that as we are brought to the Lord in baptism so we

are sharing in His death. He died for our sins so that our death sentence is paid, but we also share in His death in this way that our new man isn't drawn in by the power of sin; **we are dead to sin!** Insofar as we are new creatures in Christ we are dead to sin, but **alive to righteousness**, alive to Christ! As we grow in our appreciation of this blessed truth we will **abhor** the sin that would try to find its way into our lives. Will not lend our body, or its different individual parts to the fulfilment of sinful activity, be it our hands, or our tongues, or our eyes, or any other part of our bodies. We will use our body parts, like our feet, to turn and run from the allurements of sin which can only bring shame and death. As the Spirit empowers us to walk in newness of life and in the righteousness which glorifies Christ before the world, the opportunities to follow up those actions with words of truth and love will become increasingly common.

Embrace the purpose the Lord has given you in this life. It is more glorious than any purpose that comes to you from the world. Know that the Lord will direct your life so that you might share with another your hope of life and salvation. Know that this is the greatest thing that can happen during your earthly sojourn. Trust that the Spirit will not only give you words to speak from your heart of faith, but that the Spirit is capable of using those words to call others to faith and discipleship, that they also may have life in Jesus' name.

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.