

Acts 8: 26-40

²⁶Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." ²⁷So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

³⁰Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

³¹"How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³²The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before the shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

³³In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth."

³⁴The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" ³⁵Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" ³⁸And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both 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 suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Guidance is something that we all need – not matter what our age, no matter what our occupation. As a result there are guidance counselors in high schools and colleges. There are career counselors to provide guidance for people who wish to change their occupations. And we all have received guidance from a reliable, a loving source, at a much earlier time in our lives. On this Mother's Day we give thanks to the Lord for the blessings he gives us through mothers. It's very probable that Mom was the one who taught you some very important lessons – how to put on your socks and which shoe goes on which foot. Perhaps she was the one who helped you learn how to make those puzzling symbols we call the "ABCs." Maybe she provided that guidance with firm frown when you were on the wrong track or with a smashing smile when you were doing the right thing. Such guidance alone is reason to give thanks to the Lord for his gift of Mom.

Guidance also comes from other sources too – teachers, an older brother or sister, a spouse. In spite of what we might say, there is not one of us who has all the answers to life's challenges. We are wisest when we recognize that we benefit from the advice and encouragement of other people. What should we do? In which direction should we go? What should we pursue? There are many who knowingly or unknowingly help us to come up with an answer. We guide and we are guided. Good guidance improves our lives.

As Christians, our challenge is to stay on track – to be properly guided on our journey through life. In our gospel lesson today the Lord Jesus reminds us that we need to be connected to him, if we are to bear fruit as branches of the Vine. As we examine the account of Philip and the Ethiopian, let's all ask ourselves the question: **WHO WILL GUIDE ME?** 1) Who will guide my understanding of the Scriptures? 2) Who will guide my opportunities to witness about Jesus?

During the Easter season, the Book of Acts records for us how the message of the resurrected Lord spread as the Spirit guided the apostles. Jesus had promised, **"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."** (Acts 1:8). That promise was fulfilled as more and more people were brought to faith in Jesus. One of the individuals who shared in this spreading of the good news was Philip. This was not the Philip who was one of Jesus' twelve disciples. Rather our text talks about Philip who had been elected a deacon in Acts 6 to help care for the physical needs of the congregation in Jerusalem. But persecution had scattered the Christians, so that Philip was no longer needed to administer this welfare program. Philip left Jerusalem and headed north into Samaria. At the beginning of chapter 8, we find Philip preaching Christ in a Samaritan city. As a result, one Samaritan, Simon the Sorcerer, heard the message of Jesus, believed, and was baptized by Philip.

Our text finds Philip on a new mission. **“Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet”** (v 26-28). The Lord’s messenger directed Philip to leave Samaria, a heavily populated area, and head into an area where there were few people. Philip was being sent to share God’s Word with one man. That’s a reminder to all of us that every individual is important in God’s eyes.

This “Ethiopian” was a black man from the area south of Egypt. He was a powerful man in the government of the queen of the country. But more importantly, he was a God-fearing Gentile believer. He was returning from Jerusalem where he had attended some religious celebration. His love for the Lord is evident. He was using his travel time to read the Old Testament prophet Isaiah.

“The Spirit told Philip, ‘Go to that chariot and stay near it.’ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’ So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him” (v 29-31). Here was a man who needed guidance in God’s Word. The Ethiopian could not understand what he was reading. No individual can claim to know Scripture’s meaning through his or her own abilities. The Spirit must enlighten us through the Gospel. Even the prophets themselves had problems. Peter tells us, **“Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things** (1 Peter 1:10-12). The disciples likewise didn’t understand until Jesus opened their minds (Luke 24:45). Our human minds simply cannot understand the things of God without help. (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The Holy Spirit sent Philip to guide this man, to enlighten the Ethiopian about the Bible’s message. Isaiah and the other prophets testified about Jesus and predicted his coming. The Ethiopian was reading that portion of Isaiah where Jesus is described as the Suffering Servant of the Lord. Isaiah describes our Savior’s suffering and death. The Lamb of God, the substitute for sinners, suffered injustice and execution without complaint. Philip could tell the Ethiopian the good news that this prophecy had been fulfilled. Jesus had come and he had done all that Isaiah said he would do.

The Holy Spirit continues to guide us to see Christ, as the fulfillment of the Old Testament Scriptures. He is the Suffering Servant of Isaiah’s prophecy. What a vivid picture of the atoning work of Christ Jesus on the cross! Isaiah’s words declared to centuries of Old Testament readers the same assurance they declare to you: that Christ willingly laid down his life for your salvation! Jesus’ death means new life for countless descendants of all peoples and nations. Jesus came not just for a chosen few, but for all people of all times. That’s why it’s so important that the Spirit continues to send missionaries, evangelists, and pastors to bring light to darkened hearts.

God does not desire the death of the wicked. He saw to it that you heard and believed in his Son, so that your sins might be forgiven. Because God loves you, he sent the Spirit of his Son into your heart and is determined to keep you firm in the only faith that saves. Because God has made you his child, his Spirit also equips you to fulfill your calling as a Christian witness. Our Lord not only guides us by helping us to understand his Word. Our Lord guides us by giving us opportunities to share what we have.

Philip was directed to the Ethiopian by the angel. Who will guide my opportunities to witness about Jesus? Again, this is something which only the Lord can do. It has been suggested many times that we should focus our attention on those places that have the largest numbers of people. But our text reminds us that demographics do not always provide reliable guidance for witnessing opportunities. Philip was taken to a deserted area, not to a teeming metropolis. While it is true that we often go to large cities and metro areas, there are souls in less populated places as well. Souls in rural areas are no less important to the Lord than the souls in crowded urban centers. God must send some to seek after the one lost sheep, not only the multitudes. “Grow where you are planted.” That old proverb reminds us that God gives us work to do no matter where we happen to be. Trinity Lutheran Church may be described as a “rural congregation.” My friends, that does not mean the

work here is any less important in God's eyes. Our job under God is not to hyperventilate on numbers. We are to carry out faithfully those opportunities we have to share the Good News just as Philip did, whether with one or one thousand.

Philip was led away from the safety of people whom he knew in order to witness to a foreigner. The Spirit at times directs you away from those with whom you feel most comfortable to those who need to hear the Good News of Jesus. Not all people look alike. Not all come from the same economic or social background that we come from. The Spirit may direct you to people who seem to be outside the grace of God as the eunuch seemed to be someone foreign. In all this we can be certain that the Lord blesses in his own way our efforts to spread his name. The Spirit will continue to guide Jesus' followers today – he will continue to guide us – so that we bear much fruit in fulfilling our calling.

Mothers and other family members have opportunities to witness to Jesus' love and forgiveness daily. The workplace offers another set of unique opportunities to share the love of Jesus. The Spirit can even provide opportunities to witness to friends or total strangers.

The Ethiopian may have thought at first that it was pure coincidence that Philip was traveling that same road. But God wanted him to know the truth about Jesus and brought the two together to achieve his glorious purpose. That same Spirit works through life's events to guide you into the truth and give you opportunity to be used as a chosen instrument. May the Lord continue to guide you as you grow in faith and use the opportunities to share the Good News about Jesus. May the Lord guide us and use us to guide others. Amen.

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