

Acts 8:26-40 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

## Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

<sup>26</sup>Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south<sup>[a]</sup> to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) <sup>27</sup>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 <sup>28</sup>and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. <sup>29</sup>Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." <sup>30</sup>So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" <sup>31</sup>He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. <sup>32</sup>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.

<sup>33</sup>In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth."

<sup>34</sup>The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" <sup>35</sup>Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. <sup>36</sup>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?"<sup>[b]</sup> <sup>38</sup>He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip<sup>[c]</sup> baptized him. <sup>39</sup>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. <sup>40</sup>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.

## “THE HOLY SPIRIT AT WORK”

Acts 8:26-40

Today on Pentecost Sunday, we give God thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God with us and within us now, empowering the church, and enabling God’s people to do God’s work. Then there is the Spirit’s work of making us like more Jesus and developing within us the fruits of the Spirit. There is no time off for the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God works without ceasing.

Ten days after Jesus ascended to heaven God poured out the Holy Spirit upon the apostles. And the Holy Spirit set those apostles into action.

A preacher had the letters D.D. behind his name, and a member of his church asked him what they meant. He said, “Doctor of Divinity.” The person said to him, “Let me tell you something about those letters. Police write them on their most common arrest reports, “D.D. - Drunk and Disorderly.” Well, some people accused the apostles of being drunk and disorderly on the day of Pentecost. But they were not; they were filled with the Holy Ghost. And the Spirit empowered them to do God’s work. Peter, who had denied Jesus three times, stood up and courageously preached the Risen Christ to the crowd, including some who had helped crucify Jesus. On that day, 3000 people were baptized into Christ and the Christian church was off and running.

Now as the church continued to grow over the months, the apostles became overwhelmed. So seven men of good standing, full of wisdom and the Holy Spirit were chosen to help with the church’s relief work. Among them was a man named Philip. Soon a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and most believers were driven into the countryside. Philip went to Samaria and preached Christ there, and many converts were made. And this is where we pick up the story. Here in Acts 8:26-40 we see the Holy Spirit at work.

*To begin with, we see the Holy Spirit’s work of guidance.*

Verse 26, ‘Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the wilderness road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza.”’

Now in the Old Testament the activity of an angel was the activity of the Holy Spirit. Don’t forget that the Spirit of God was active in the Old Testament. God’s Spirit hovered over the waters at creation. God sent the Spirit upon certain people at certain times to empower them for specific tasks. But at Pentecost God sent the Holy Spirit upon the whole church in a new and powerful way. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, the church’s crucified and Risen Lord.

So when that the angel spoke to Philip it was God's Spirit speaking. The Spirit led Philip away from the mission field of Samaria to that unpromising wilderness road. Philip obeyed the Spirit's promptings. "He got up and went." And the result was the first record we have of a Gentile convert to Christ, the first fruits of a great harvest to come.

The Holy Spirit still guides us and often in ways we cannot predict. We plan to do one thing, but then feel a compulsion to do something else or go in a different direction. I may set out to see one person, but then I feel a strong urge to go and see someone else who has a special need that day. It doesn't happen often, but it has happened enough to know that the Spirit was at work.

When I declared my intention to go into the ministry, I had a decent job in Toronto, with a decent salary. I would be giving that up for three years of virtually no income at seminary, followed by a few years of rather low income ministering in a place that the wider church would choose for me. To some people, it made no sense. But the Spirit had spoken to me and guided me into ministry in a very compelling way. You might think such a call would cause much anxiety and unrest. But once it came and I said "Yes," I was at peace. And it's worked out for good in ways I couldn't have imagined.

Sometimes the Spirit's work of guidance in our lives is clear and unmistakable. Sometimes we see it in retrospect. But the Spirit will never guide us in a way that contradicts Scripture. God's ways are sometimes mysterious, but they are always good. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to the church and to each Christian believer. The Holy Spirit dwells with you and within you. So be open to his guiding work.

*Next, we see another aspect of the Spirit's work. He helps to understand Scripture.*

Riding in a carriage along that wilderness road was the treasurer of Ethiopia, in those days a prosperous land. This man was a eunuch. This may have been a requirement for men who worked closely with the Queen. There would be no temptation in the Queen's court. In any case, he was a God fearing man who was attracted to the Jewish faith. He was going home after worshipping in the Jerusalem Temple. He had with him a scroll of the prophet Isaiah and was reading a passage aloud. "Like a sheep led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer; so he does not open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth."

The Spirit told Philip to go over and join the chariot. Philip asked the man, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He answered, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" He invited Philip into the carriage and asked, "About whom, may I ask, does the prophet say this, about himself, or someone else?" And Philip began to explain the prophet's words.

Without the Spirit's help, the Bible can remain a closed book to us. But the Holy Spirit opens our minds to Scripture and helps us grasp its meaning. When we read Scripture it is good to pray, "Lord, may your Spirit help me understand and apply this passage to my life." The Spirit also helps us understand Scripture by giving us Spirit-led teachers and preachers. Because Philip was filled with the Spirit he could explain that passage to the Ethiopian. I hope that in my own ministry, the Spirit uses me to help you understand the Bible's message. The Spirit works in us and through others to help us understand Scripture.

*Moving along, we see the Spirit's work of leading us to Christ.*

Now there are many powers and principalities in the world leading us away from Christ or preventing us from coming to him. But the Holy Spirit works powerfully against these forces and leads us to Christ. Leading people to Christ is the Holy Spirit's main work in the world. Verse 35. "...starting with this Scripture, Philip proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus." Philip took those words of Isaiah and showed the Ethiopian how they were fulfilled in Christ. Christ is the Lamb of God, the suffering servant, who takes away the sin of the world. The centre of Scripture is Jesus Christ - incarnate, crucified, risen, ascended and coming again. All Scripture finally leads to him. And Philip, filled with the Holy Spirit, knew it. No doubt he said to the Ethiopian – you are a good man, a religious man, but you need Christ as your Saviour, Lord, and Friend. All of us do, without exception. Jesus Christ is the One who meets all our hopes and fears. In him is life and life eternal. The Holy Spirit works to lead us to Christ.

*Further, the Holy Spirit works in us to make a Christian commitment.*

Through Philip's words, the Spirit led the Ethiopian to Christ. But the Spirit's work was not finished. Now the Spirit moved the Ethiopian to make a Christian commitment. Verse 36, 'As they were going along the road, they came to water, and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" Well, nothing. His very question was a sign of his faith. The chariot stopped and Philip and the eunuch went down into the water. There Philip baptized him as he received Christ as Saviour and Lord. The Spirit led the Ethiopian to make a Christian commitment.

It is wonderful when an adult comes to me and says, "I've never been baptized, but I would like to be. I trust in Christ and I want to make a Christian commitment." Such a request means that the Holy Spirit is at work. I am very pleased to baptize that person. But even if you have already been baptized and confirmed, the Spirit works to deepen your Christian commitment. Every time the word is opened and proclaimed, every time the bread and cup is shared, the Holy Spirit works to strengthen your faith in Christ and your commitment to live as a faithful follower.

*Finally, we see here that the Holy Spirit works to bring us joy, even in the wilderness.*

Verse 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."

The eunuch had received the Saviour and now the Holy Spirit filled him with joy. That's no surprise, for joy is a fruit of the Spirit. And this joy came to him on a wilderness road. Other sources tell us that the Ethiopian went back to his country and starting spreading the Good News about Jesus. No doubt he unfolded his scroll and with great enthusiasm began telling people about the promised Saviour. He understood Isaiah's prophecy and now helped others to understand. A Christian church began in Ethiopia which endures to this very day. And while this man would never have a wife and children of his own, he now had a new family of Christian brothers and sisters. The whole experience on the wilderness road filled him with joy.

In life we sometimes find ourselves on wilderness roads. We are all walking such a road in this time of COVID -19. But even along this road the Holy Spirit can surprise us with joy. It's the joy that comes from knowing that we are children of God, loved greatly, loved eternally, that we belong to a big family with many sisters and brothers in Christ, and that we have a great hope in heaven. Even on the wilderness roads, the Spirit works to bring us hope and joy. And even as the Holy Spirit works for us, he also works in us, empowering us to work for God. May God bless you and fill you this very day with the Holy Spirit.