

Acts 8:26-39  
Mission Festival - Epiphany 5  
February 5, 2012

**Acts 8:26-39 New International Version (NIV)**

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

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

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

<sup>32</sup> This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. <sup>33</sup> In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth."<sup>[b]</sup>

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

<sup>36</sup> As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" <sup>[37]</sup> <sup>[c]</sup> <sup>38</sup> And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. <sup>39</sup> When 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.

Dear Friends in Christ,

I was in about 5<sup>th</sup> grade in a little country church/school in western Minnesota and we were having a Mission Festival project at our school. I'm sure we had them before but for whatever reason this one really clicked with me. We were taking a special school collection for mission work. Honestly, can't remember where it was being sent- thinking Japan or Africa. But the explanation of the work and the need really moved me. The day came for the big collection and I remember taking the money I had in my "savings" box- all the money I had--- like ten dollars... and had it in my hand to take to school. My mom caught me with the ten dollars and asked - what is that for? I explained- for the mission offering. She knew that was all I had and so gently said... "That's nice, but you know you don't have to give all your money." I know- but I want to... and I did. It was a feeling of joy- I didn't show others. But I, Mark Henrich, 10 year old boy from Goodhue, Minnesota was doing mission work!

I loved Goodhue, Minnesota. Farm country. Goodhue was good living, good living. Our closest neighbors had children our age and so I played with my good buddy Rick- it seemed like every summer day. Always. Except on Sunday morning. Because on Sunday morning, we went to church and Rick's family didn't- even though they lived just one field down- never came to church. In fact, I vividly remember on some Sunday mornings that Rick's dad would be riding tractor on Sunday morning- in the field next to our country church. No air conditioning so windows open...every time the tractor came to our end of the field, the pastor would pause and wait for it to turn around. And a couple of times, Rick's dad chose Sunday morning to ...to "spread honey"- do you know what that means? We all got a good whiff. And I remember thinking... don't they know we have church?

A short time later we moved away and 25 years later, I am asked to return to that little country church to talk about mission work. Have been a missionary in the island of Antigua in the Caribbean for some years and they asked me- son of the congregation, to speak. Was wonderful to go back and as I stepped into the pulpit, I looked out and- shock of the world- I saw Rick, his parents, his

whole family. I smiled. How nice. They must have heard I was preaching and made it a point to come see me. After the service, there were handshakes and hugs. I said to Rick's mom- "I'm so glad we came to hear me preach today..." and she said. "Well, it was nice to hear you preach but we didn't come just to hear you...this is our church... we go here now." Really- wow that's great - how did that happen? And ..I still hear her words, "How did it happen?- someone came to our house and invited us." ...someone came to our house and invited us... And then it hit me, I never did. I never once invited Rick to come with me to church. I was excited about doing mission work... but I never connected that mission work was also my friend and neighbor. That was a lesson 25 years in the learning. And now it is some years later and this reality is still with me- **Mission work means lifelong learning.** Where are you, today, on the mission work learning curve?

1.

Question 101- Who does mission work? Let's follow one person. The one person? Philip. We first meet this Philip in Acts chapter 6. It was early in the life of the Christian church and the church was experiencing some growing pains. The disciples found themselves occupying more and more of their schedules with the certain aspects of church work, like settling disputes, distributing food and less and less time involved in preaching the word. So they chose 7 men who were filled with the Spirit and wisdom to help them. One of these men was Philip. Another one was a man named Stephen. Remember what happened to him? This Stephen was called before the Sanhedrin...he told them about the Christ they had killed and they became so infuriated that they put him to death...they stoned him.

And what an effect this had on the Christian church. Chapter 8:1 tells us, "**On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria.**" Verse 4 tells us, "**Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there.**" Philip had been given special work in the church but Philip wasn't an apostle. He wasn't a pastor. But he was a Christian...he was filled with the Spirit. He had Christ in his heart and Christ in his heart was a Christ to share. Jesus had given the command to all disciples, to all his followers to "Go, and teach all nations." Philip did an amazing thing... He took this command to heart. It means me. And so when he went to a certain city he didn't say now what and wait for a pastor to come, or wait for a committee to form ☺ . He had work to do. He had a message to share. It was his work. It was his joy.

Lesson 101- God's called me...to do his work. You the grandma and grandpa, you the teenager, you the child, you the new member, you the "veteran" member, you who said good-bye to a family member, you who are struggling in your family. You who are so busy. You have a message to share. And yes, we often feel like Moses, "Not me, Lord, no, not me, I can't talk. I don't know the Scriptures as well as I should." But the command still comes...Go...you.

2.

Go where? Philip went to Samaria and while he was there an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said go to the desert road. So Philip followed, he left his active ministry with many people. And along a desert road he met one person. He met the eunuch from Ethiopia, important official, in charge of the treasury of Candace. We know the rest of the story. We know what Philip witnessed to him. But was it so automatic...so easy? Might there have been a temptation for Philip to keep walking by and look for a different prospect. Might have been intimidating...this was first of all a man in a high position...can't bother him can I? Also was a foreigner, a man of a different race. Not always easy approaching people of different races or backgrounds. But yet the spirit meant this man, "**Go near the chariot and stay near it.**" So Philip went...not only went but he ran up to the chariot...no hesitation here. This is where God wanted him to be.

OK, easy enough for Philip...he had the spirit giving him specific instructions...giving him a road map of where to go with a big X on this person...this is the one. Now Jesus tells all of us go- and we say where? We look and we don't see a map of where we are to go. We don't see people with big X's...signs "talk to me". How can we carry out the mission work the Lord has asked of us? Where should we go? Where are you on the Mission learning curve? Isn't it a joy to learn;

- All nations (far away places) Maybe I can't go but my prayers and offerings- huge- joy
- To remember that all nations also means this nation. Brother in law young pastor in Boulder Colorado- fields are ripe...
- This town, my neighbors, my family, co-workers - who is my Rick? This congregation- Nora (befriended) God has placed you at this place, at this time in your life.
- That there are ways for us, who live here (single or married, young or old) to also go, and serve, with the variety of gifts that God has given us... how do I even make a step forward? Young teacher- just asked me this last week- I'm looking at a vacation for this summer but I

would like to do mission work (is involved in our congregation- canvassing) – how do I start? Good place to look is here- Wels Kingdom Workers... (brochure) so many opportunities, so many places, so many needs...

3.

To go- why? Not just for the activity but because of the message and for the message. Why was Philip called to the desert road? Why was he to go near the chariot? Because that eunuch from Ethiopia needed to hear the message Philip had. Yes, he had gone to Jerusalem to worship. Yes, the eunuch was reading Scripture. He was reading from the great chapter of the Old Testament from Isaiah 53. Beautiful chapter prophesying about how the Messiah would need to die. But this eunuch was confused. He didn't know what this Scripture meant. Philip said, **"Do you understand what you are reading?"** The eunuch didn't but he was looking for answers. **"Tell me please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?"** Now was Philip's opportunity. **"Then Philip began with that very passage and told him the good news about Jesus."** Philip gave him a clear message about Christ. Yes, Jesus did suffer. But know why he suffered...to pay for your sins and mine. Yes, he did die, but look he rose again. Your sins are paid for, believe and be baptized. Don't look to yourself, look to Christ. The eunuch did look to Christ, with new eyes, he believed and was baptized.

That searching heart of the eunuch fills our world today- surrounds us. And then to know that we have what is most needed. By God's grace, we have that same message of salvation. We know the cross, the forgiveness, the victory... We come here to be strengthened in that knowledge through Word and Sacrament, to encourage and be encouraged. This is my prayer for me, for you...

*"Open our eyes to see the great and noble mission that lies before us. In the hurting eyes of the lonely, in the pained eyes of the sick, and in the searching eyes of the lost, help us to see your face, O Jesus, and to serve others as we would serve you. Awaken us to the opportunities you give to proclaim your message of love" (from prayer for Mission of the Church in CW)*

That's not just a mission prayer- that's a daily prayer. Mission work- it's lifelong learning. It's our work. And it's our joy. Amen