

The Fifth Sunday Of Easter

May 10, 2009

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church - Pastor Chip Wilke

Acts 8:26-40

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. 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. The 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. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 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. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea. (NIV)

My parents had a plaque on the wall in our home growing up. Perhaps you have seen a similar one. It reads: *I asked the Lord: "How much do you love me?" "This much," He answered and then He stretched out his arms and died.* We truly see, especially in this festival part of the church year, how much the Lord loves us. We see that love when Jesus left heaven and humbly became a baby, true man, for us. We focused on that love as Jesus humbled Himself and put Himself under the law to perfectly fulfill it for us. The Lord's love for us is evident as He sent His own beloved Son to suffer what we deserve and take our punishment. Jesus loved us so much that He stretched out His arms on a cross and died to take away our sin. The Lord loved us so much that He would not stop until the victory of the empty tomb was ours and all our enemies (namely sin, death, and the devil) were defeated. The Lord loved us so much that through Word and Sacrament He reached down, wrapped His mighty arms around us, and made us His own children. That's how much the Lord loves me.

Today, we are reminded of the Lord's love not just for you and me, but for every single person. Every single one of the 6 billion plus people in this world is loved by the Lord. He values every life. His Son suffered and died for each soul. That's why the Lord guides His Church. That's why the Lord gives us His Word. This morning we will consider how: **The Lord loves each and every soul. He sends messengers to them. He uses His message to save them.**

The Lord's disciples were busy carrying out the command to take the good news to all creation. One of those disciples was Philip. Philip you may recall was one of the seven chosen to help the twelve apostle's who were getting so busy that they were starting to neglect the ministry of the Word and prayer. But Philip was more than just someone who helped wait on tables. As a believer in Christ Jesus he too served the Lord by telling others the good news. In fact, in Samaria he spread God's Word to a great number of people. The whole place was filled with joy as people were being brought to faith and baptized. The ministry was going so well there Peter and John even came to help.

That's why it must have been a bit surprising when we hear: ***"Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Go south to the road--the desert road--that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.'" Why would the Lord send an angel to tell Philip to leave a place where things were going well and go to a new place? Why would the Lord take Philip from the city where there were many people and lead him to a desert where there wasn't anything but one traveler? Yet, Philip without question listens to the Lord. He goes to Gaza and "on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians."*** Then God gives Philip further instructions as the Spirit tells him ***"Go to that chariot and stay near it."***

Is there any question left about who guides the Church? Is there any question about how much the Lord loves each and every soul? On this desert road there was a man the Lord loves. There was a single soul that was very important to him - a eunuch - an Ethiopian. So the Lord sends his messenger to him.

If you are sitting here this morning it is because the Lord has done the same for you. He loved you so much He sent a messenger to you. He sent someone to teach you God's Word. Remember Philip was not an apostle, but he was more like a layman in the church. Who was the messenger God sent to you because your soul was so precious to Him? For many of us it was our mothers. If you had a mom who showed you how to pray, a mom that first taught you how Jesus loves you, she was serving as the Lord's messenger. If your mom was the Lord's messenger for you on this mother's day when you thank your mom for everything, especially thank her for telling you about Jesus. If you are a mom think of the awesome privilege and responsibility the Lord gives to you to be His messenger to those little eternal souls loved by God.

The Lord's love for each and every soul moves Him to send messengers to them. Now more than that, the Lord's love also provides His message to save them. This Ethiopian eunuch was looking in the right place. This God-fearing man was returning from Jerusalem, probably after attending one of the religious festivals and he was reading the Scriptures. Philip hears him reading from Isaiah and asks: ***"Do you understand what you are reading?" "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him... Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus."*** This eunuch was reading the Bible and not just any chapter of the Bible. He was reading about the suffering servant pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquity. He was reading about the One on whom God laid the sins of us all. He was reading about the lamb who goes willingly, silently to the slaughter - the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

When *“the eunuch asked Philip, ‘Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?’* Philip gave him the answer even our Sunday school children could have given. Jesus. This passage is talking about Jesus. The Bible is a book about Jesus. From beginning to end it points us to the good news that Jesus is our Savior. Those who believe in Jesus and are baptized in His name will be saved. After hearing the good news the eunuch wants to be baptized. Using water and the Word, Philip baptizes this Ethiopian man. This eunuch now rejoices in the joy of salvation. The Lord loved this soul and saved this soul with His life-giving message. Then Philip, after being carried away by the Spirit, kept carrying this gospel message to others.

The Lord loves each and every soul. That’s why the Lord sends His Word to the four corners of the earth. That’s why His message was sent to us. He wanted to save us. Through water and the Word the Lord made us heirs of a heavenly inheritance. Through the good news of Jesus the Lord washed away our sins and gave us life with Him. We too can go away rejoicing.

But I also pray we go away this morning like Philip. The Lord may not send us directly into the desert where we find someone reading the Bible and ready to ask us a question. However, the Lord does send people into our lives that do not know the message. Who is your Ethiopian eunuch? Who is the person in your life that doesn’t know the Bible is a book about Jesus? What opportunities does the Lord give to you to be His messenger?

Unfortunately, who of us could claim that we have always loved each and every soul like the Lord asks of us? Which of us could claim we haven’t committed this sin of omission when it comes to sharing God’s good news with others? God is not pleased when Christians keep Christ to themselves. The Lord is not happy when we show little concern about the truth that unbelievers who die go to an eternity in hell. God gets angry when eternal souls of other people are unimportant to us. His anger burns when our mouths remain shut because we lose sight of the immeasurable importance of each and every soul.

But then again that is why my Lord stretched out His arms on a cross and died. Jesus suffered for my lack of concern and love for others. Jesus suffered because I haven’t loved and haven’t always shared His Word with people like I should. Jesus died for my sin. That’s how much the Lord loves me. That’s how precious your soul, and my soul, and each and every other 6 billion plus person’s soul here on earth is to the Lord. The Lord loves everyone. The Lord created and redeemed each and every soul. That’s why God sent Philip out onto that desert road. There was a soul out there that needed saving. Who knows what roads in life the Lord has planned for you? While you are on them look for those eunuchs in your life. Like Philip, God is sending you. The Lord doesn’t just leave it up to pastors and teachers. You are His messengers the Lord sends to souls He loves. You have God’s saving message to proclaim - the good news - Jesus. For you truly know this is how much the Lord loves us! Amen.