
My Sermon from Sunday May 2, 2021, Easter 5 ~ "Listen And Act!"

I speak to you in the name of the true vine, Jesus. Amen.

You could probably name at least half of the 12 Disciples. Here are 6: **Peter, Andrew, James, John, Philip, Nathaniel . . .** and so on. How many of the **first 7 Deacons** can you name?! These deacons were chosen during the early days of the church in Jerusalem. Seven ***"men of good standing, full of the Spirit and of wisdom"*** were selected and ordained through the laying on hands by the apostles. These deacons were carefully chosen to care for the poor of the Christian community in Jerusalem.

You might be able to name **Stephen** as he was one of the 7 deacons and he was stoned to death, the first Christian martyr. Another deacon was a man named **Philip** and he is prominent in this conversion story that is recorded in the 8th chapter of the Book of Acts.

What do we know about Philip? We refer to him as **"Philip the Evangelist"** to differentiate him from "Philip the Apostle." After the stoning of Stephen, Deacon Philip went out on a road trip up north to Samaria to preach, to baptize, and to heal (Acts 8). Philip ***"proclaimed the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ."*** Philip was a true witness of the empty tomb and the redemptive power of Jesus.

We also know that Philip was filled with the Spirit of God and listened carefully to the voice of God and then acted. Philip had a strong urge to go south-west from Jerusalem and head out on the road. He listened to the voice of God, that small voice that speaks to us in our hearts, and then Philip acted. **Listen and act.**

"An angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' So Philip got up and went." (Acts 8). This was a change in plan, as Philip had been witnessing north of Jerusalem in Samaria. When have you changed your plans? What happened?

When I was finishing high school, I was living in Europe. I always thought that I would follow in the footsteps of my grandfather and my two brothers and go to *Queen's University*. I was accepted and received a scholarship for \$600 which was a huge amount of money in the early 1970's when a full year of university tuition was \$400 and room and board was \$600. I turned it down because a voice in my heart was calling me to *Trinity College* at the *University of Toronto*. Thankfully, my wonderful parents were very supportive of all of my decisions. By going to U of T, I met Jouni and we moved up to Thunder Bay. I received a call to ordination and here I am many years later doing what I feel absolutely called to do. My life would have been very different if I had gone to *Queen's*.

Back to Philip. Philip sees a man in a chariot travelling away from Jerusalem. The man is employed by Queen Candace of Ethiopia. He is well-educated because he can read in Greek. He is also wealthy because he is travelling in a



chariot and he owns his own scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He had gone to the temple in Jerusalem to worship and was a believer in God. However, he could never have been accepted as a Jew because he was a eunuch. I am sorry that he is identified in this way by Luke who wrote the Book of Acts. Seeing as Luke was a physician, it is understandable that this fact was mentioned. Men were often castrated if they served in the royal court.

What else do we learn from the Bible? We learn that Philip runs over to the chariot and the man invites him to get in and sit beside him. That in itself is an act of trust as the 'wilderness road' south would have been a road of danger, a road of crime. There must have been something in the demeanor of Philip that made the Ethiopian feel very safe. This was a sign that the God of love, that perfect love, casts out fear. (from 1 John:4)



The man reading scripture from his scroll is a humble man, as he admits to Philip that he does not understand what he is reading. Philip is in his element and he has already had plenty of experience witnessing the gospel up north in Samaria. Philip tells the man that the sheep being led to the slaughter from Isaiah is a prophecy about Jesus. Philip shares the good news of our salvation with the man. Wouldn't we have loved to be in that chariot to have heard that conversation?



What happens next? The man sees a body of water, and asks Philip if he could be baptized. The man is cautious and has probably been told many times why it is

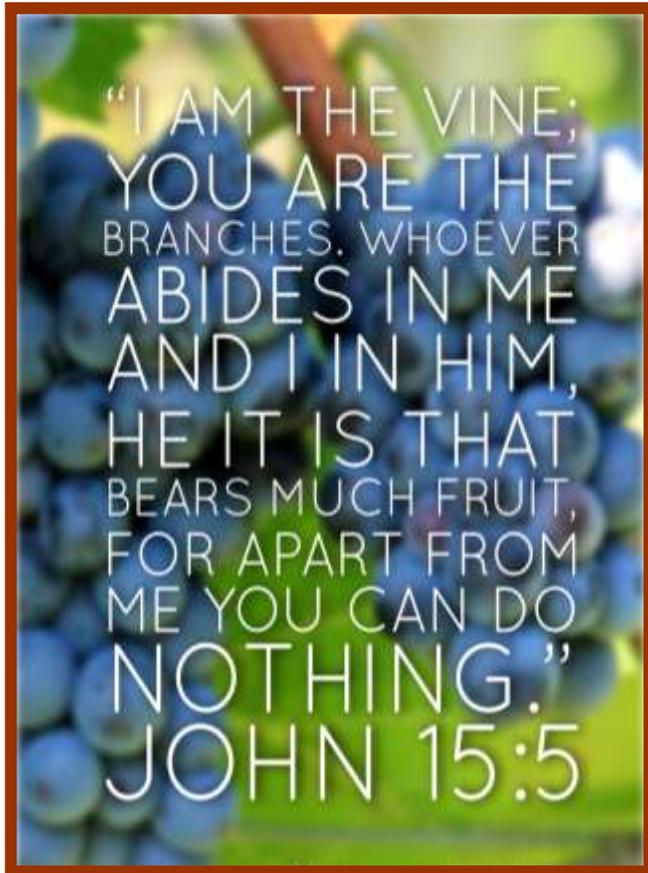
not possible for him to be converted to Judaism. He ponders out loud *"What is to prevent me from being baptized?"* He waits for the 'NO' from Philip but there is only a 'YES' forthcoming.

Philip baptizes this man. Sadly, we are not told his name. Then Philip leaves and the man, this new Christian, carries on back home. To Ethiopia. We believe that this is how many Ethiopians became Christian, through the witness of this man. This man was the first Ethiopian Christian.

Imagine the gratitude in the heart of the Ethiopian. Who have been the Philips in your life who have come to you at critical times in your pilgrimage?



An early Church Father, Irenaeus, wrote about the Ethiopian Eunuch in the 2nd century. He called the man **Simeon Bachos the Eunuch**. Simeon Bachos means “Simeon also called The Black.” Irenaeus wrote that the Ethiopian preached what he believed, that God became a person in the form of Jesus and was led like a lamb to the slaughter and that he redeemed the world by dying for us. I would like to think that Irenaeus had heard that this man’s name was truly Simeon.



The story of Philip as recorded in the Book of Acts does not end with the baptism of the Ethiopian man. What else does the Bible tell us? We learn that Philip was married and near the end of the Book of Acts we find him living in a seaside town called Caesarea Maritima with his 4 daughters who were all believers and who all had the gift of prophecy. While there, the apostle Paul was Philip’s house guest for “*several days.*” The story of the Ethiopian does end in the Bible with his rejoicing as he travels home.

“I am the vine, you are the branches, says the Lord. Those who abide in me, and I in them, bear much fruit.” (John 15:1-2)

And fruit is what the Ethiopian bore. Today, in Ethiopia, 62% of the population is Christian. It is by far the dominant religion.

And fruit is what Philip bore through listening and acting. Philip knew the true vine, and he was a branch that bore much fruit. If we live in Christ and Christ lives in us, we bear much fruit.

I love celtic knots which are made up of vines woven together. Jesus says that if we abide in the vine, we glorify God and we give God JOY. God wants us to become disciples of Jesus and this is what gives God JOY.

The celtic knots signify eternity and God’s love. The knot is one vine and you can’t tell where it begins and where it ends. It is an eternal sign of the love of God. “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.”



This morning let us give thanks for the true vine of Christ, for Philip who listened and acted, for the Ethiopian who listened and acted, and for each of you who listens and acts.

Amen.

Archdeacon Deborah+
