

The Good News

Acts 8:26-40

May 6, 2018

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples, they would be witnesses. Their witness would begin in Jerusalem. It would expand into all of Judea and Samaria...and eventually reach the ends of the earth.

In the first seven chapters of Acts, we read about that witness in Jerusalem. The seventh chapter ends with the stoning of Stephen. On the day Stephen was martyred, a severe persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem. Many of Jesus' followers were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. So the witness was beginning to move beyond the confines of Jerusalem. This is exactly what Jesus said would happen. The fourth verse of chapter eight says, "Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went."

One of those who was scattered was Philip. He preached in Samaria. He then witnessed to an Ethiopian. This is the story we read in our text. It is another great story.

Philip received a divine directive to go south to the road that went from Jerusalem to Gaza. This was known as the desert road. On that road he met a certain man...an Ethiopian eunuch. This was an important man in his country. He occupied a high political office. He was in charge of the treasury of the queen of Ethiopia. He was a non-Jew. He had been to Jerusalem to worship. It is safe to say that he had been on some sort of religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

He had in his possession a copy of the prophecy of Isaiah. For a non-Jew to get his hands on a copy of the scroll of Isaiah...well, that

would not have been a common thing. So I'm guessing he was viewed as a rather religious man. Perhaps he had converted to Judaism. Or he was a God-fearer. A God-fearer was a non-Jew who did not convert to Judaism, but who worshipped the God of the Jews. You see, many of the nations around Israel were filled with people who worshipped many gods. There were also many people who were attracted to the faith of the Jews because the Jews worshipped one God.

The Holy Spirit told Philip to go to the chariot the Ethiopian was in and to stay near it. Philip obeyed. Philip asked the man if he understood what he was reading. The Ethiopian wondered how he could understand what he was reading if there was no one to explain to him what he was reading. He invited Philip to sit with him in his chariot.

The Ethiopian was reading that section of Isaiah that talks about a man who was led like a sheep to slaughter. In our Bibles that is the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. He had made his way through most of the book. He wondered about whom the author was talking. Philip began with that passage of Scripture, and he told the man all about the good news of Jesus. The result was that Ethiopian was baptized. He became a follower of Jesus. He committed his life to Jesus. Tradition, for what it's worth, says this Ethiopian returned to his homeland and became an evangelist.

I think this passage speaks to us in many ways.

The first—and, I believe, most important—truth we glean from the text is this following Jesus deal is not limited to a select group of people. Contrary to what some think, there is no corner on the following-Jesus market...nor is the truth