

Sermon Text for January 26, 2025

By Seminary Intern Jen Eisenberg

“Coming to Worship Jesus”

Scriptures: Isaiah 53:4-7 and Acts 8:26-40

Where do I see trouble in the text?

- The Ethiopian does not understand what he’s reading and wants to know
- **On the road- movement; people go their own way (Is 53:6, “we have all turned to our own way”)**
- Holy Spirit acts on Philip, the one with more knowledge, insight, closer to Jesus, power, etc
- Philip- Deacon means he does evangelism- categories are not rigid

Where do I see trouble in our people?

- Attendance challenge
- **“frozen chosen”- not much talk about Holy Spirit- stuck in our own ways**
- Road from Jerusalem to Gaza does not exist
- Deacons struggle to meet needs face to face- function administratively

What is the good news in the text?

- The Ethiopian learns of Jesus and wants to/ is baptized- and rejoices
- **The Way is the place of revelation, interracial/ intercontinental connection, the global church is formed and grows. The place of trouble is where the Spirit sends His representatives.**
- Philip’s has front row seats to God’s miracles and joyful revelations.
- The Holy Spirit allowed/ caused Philip to be able to act like a guide for the Ethiopian’s spiritual journey.
- The Holy Spirit determined Philip’s ministry (v.40)
- Both Jesus and the Ethiopian have a good and happy future, despite the forces that would limit their future (injustice, commitment to being a eunuch).
- Jesus was like a sheep led to the slaughter, and the punishment upon him made us whole.

What is the good news for Strasburg?

- The Holy Spirit desires to locate us in opportune relationships, locales and transitions to provide guidance and the good news.
- The Holy Spirit takes the lead in determining of the size of our church.
- Partnership with God/ HS looks like listening prayer and acting on what we hear.
- **Wholeness, healing, guidance, the good news, connection with others and God, is available in “the Way” of service, of God/ the Spirit/ the prophet. More joy to be had.**

1. On the road- movement; people go their own way (Is 53:6, “we have all turned to our own way”)

2. “frozen chosen”- not much talk about Holy Spirit- stuck in our own ways

3. The Way is the place of revelation, interracial/ intercontinental connection, the global church is formed and grows. The place of trouble is where the Spirit sends His representatives.

4. Wholeness, healing, guidance, the good news, connection with others and God, is available in “the Way” of service, of God/ the Spirit/ the prophet. More joy to be had.

P08

Main Point: The Holy Spirit prompts us toward His Way to grow the church and share joy.

So what? Describe what the prompting of the Holy Spirit might sound/ feel like. “Test it out” to confirm or clarify. Don’t be put off if you’re wrong.

This morning, I hope you will come with me on a little detour from Matthew into Acts.

For the last 2 years, we have focused on the ministry and the meaning of Jesus’ life and death from Matthew’s point of view.

Acts tells the story of the Holy Spirit.

On this detour, we may see how the Spirit acts in accord with the Word, the Son of God. In fact, Paul often speaks of the Spirit of Christ.

I also want to mention that sometimes a sermon takes a different turn than the title printed in the bulletin.

A better title for today is:

The Holy Spirit had a road for Philip.

And the Holy Spirit has a road for you too.

Prayer

Read Acts 8:26-40

Isaiah 53:4-7 is our first reading today, because it sits at the center of our Acts story. There is one line I want us to notice: *we have all turned to our own way*. To our modern ears, this saying could sound like a good thing: I can just hear the parent of a teen who is struggling say, “everyone has their own way of doing things... as long as they get there.” Or maybe about a coworker who has their own unique way of getting things done.

But, for Isaiah it is a corporate confession of sin. We go our own way, not God’s way. He confesses, we reversed how things were designed to be. Isaiah, with his rich imagery and metaphor helps us see that ‘going our own way’ is like the sheep telling the shepherd where to find the best grass and gurgling brook. That’s absurd.

What about the way of the Ethiopian in Acts?

Verse 27-28 tells us “he had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home.”

The main character in our story
is a dignified Ethiopian man.
Though unnamed,
He had the means, the team and the capacity to go places.
So, he embarked on an adventure of a lifetime.
It is likely,
he traveled in style close to 2,000 miles
on this bucket list trip.
From Ethiopia to Jerusalem.
He was in search of something meaningful.
Was he a God-fearer?
A Jew?
We only know he was interested in Yahweh.
We know
because he was reading a scroll of God's prophet Isaiah.
Maybe it was a souvenir he picked up
while he was in Jerusalem.
And it held his attention on the ride home.

This Ethiopian financier
Like so many at the time,
did not understand Isaiah 53.
He was confused about who endured this suffering?
Who was struck down unfairly?
Who would submit himself to this pain and misery
for another?
Was it the prophet or someone else?
Though he had searched for God
His questions lingered.

Philip does not have his own way in this story.
His way is the Spirit's way.
First, he is directed by an angel of the Lord
to go to the Road to Gaza.
He does.
Then, the Spirit of God
directs Philip to the Ethiopian's chariot.
[Read from our Bibles]
v 30 says 'Go over to this chariot and join it.
So, Philip ran up to it'.

By the end, the Spirit does not even need to speak.
Philip operates in complete agreement with the Spirit of God:
Verse 39 says, The Spirit of God ‘snatched’ Philip away
and took him to the next place and people.
Philip never could have imagined that this is how God would chose to reach
the ends of the earth.
In this story, Philip is the picture of another kind of servant.

So, the Ethiopian did not get far.
The road from Jerusalem to Gaza might be 65 miles.
On this is road,
the promise of Jesus happens.
The Spirit introduces him to Philip, the deacon.

I’m not saying good things don’t happen in church.
I’m just saying that in this story
good things happen on the way home from church, too.

See, in Acts 1:8, Jesus had promised his followers “You will be my witnesses in
Jerusalem, in all Judea, in Samaria and to the ends of the earth.”

And so, they were his witnesses.
The early church exploded in size and scope.
More servants were needed.
We’re told in Acts 6, the growing church chose seven from among them.
These seven were full of the Spirit and wisdom of God.
Philip was an original servant deacon.
In fact, he was in Samaria,
proclaiming Jesus and
teaching Samaritans how to follow the way of Jesus,
when an angel of the Lord interrupted him.

So, the story of our servant Philip meets
the story of the Ethiopian Queen’s servant when he
was on his way home to the end of the earth.
The Holy Spirit sent Philip to join him in the journey for a short time and
answer his question.

Have you ever been interrupted by that phone call?
Yes, sometimes it is my son asking me to drop off some forgotten item.

But, when it's not.
When it's a prompting from the Spirit,
when my heart suspects and fears
that it is God speaking...
Well, that is really challenging to me.

I like my plans for my day, my week... my decade!

We love our routines and habits... our ways of doing things and we don't especially love it when it gets thrown off. This is true for us as a body, too. I mean, we are the people who don't change the carpet color and who some call, the frozen chosen.

The way of Jesus sometimes surprises us.
On the road to Gaza,
just outside Jerusalem,
in the final stretch of a grand adventure,
we find out that the good news will travel the ends of the earth,
in the heart of an Ethiopian courtier/ financier.
Who would have thought?

The good news in this story is in the hands of an Ethiopian.
It is the beginning, not only of his personal understanding,
His new life in Christ,
It is the beginning of the transformation of an entire nation,
It is the beginning of a new chapter in the history of God's work in the world
It is the beginning of Christian life,
Christian joy,
Christian obedience in hundreds of thousands of lives.

There are saints in this room: Saints who live with this kind of open minded, open hearted flexibility which gladly waits on the Lord. We need to hear your stories of doing this. In this season, when we are trying to open our doors and our lives to add to the number of believers here in Strasburg, we need to remember our stories of God directing our way to the people who want to know and understand Jesus.

If you are one of those saints, we need to hear...

- What is your habit of praying that allowed you to hear the Spirit's prompting?
- What did the Spirit whisper- or shout- to you?

- What happened when you followed the prompt?

Make no mistake,
The Holy Spirit is the star of this story.
Absolutely.
But let's not miss
that the good news runs through the yes of a deacon.
The way is made known through the mouth of one man.
The good news has a path to travel,
because one person was willing to be moved by the Spirit,
in the Way of Jesus.
This weekend, we celebrate God's provision of another set of servants in this
church.
We have every reason to be grateful.
God is faithful.
But know, it is the Spirit
Coming in the way of Christ,
Moving those who say yes to service, to suffering, to caring
It is the Spirit of God who
has always and will forever,
animate the life of this church.

The Holy Spirit has a road for each of us.