

April 28, 2024
Fifth Sunday of Easter
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Acts 8:26–40 (John 15:1–8; 1 John 4:1–11)

EVERY ONE IS IMPORTANT.

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Not only is Christ risen indeed, our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are living and active among us in the world today. God the Father takes no pleasure in the death of anyone but desires all people – each and every individual one – to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (cf: Ezekiel 18:32; 1 Timothy 2:4) As we heard in our epistle reading, God’s great love was:

“... made manifest among us, that [He] sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:9–10)

So, how do people come to the knowledge that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for their sin and be saved? Just prior to His ascension into heaven, Jesus taught that disciples are made by baptizing and teaching all that Jesus has commanded on the basis of His saving authority. (cf: Matthew 28:19–20) Disciples are made by baptizing and teaching God’s Word... baptizing and teaching the Good News of Christ Jesus. Christ’s Church is not alone as she baptizes and teaches. Jesus is with her, sustaining and enabling the making of disciples. He says:

“... I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20)

The church will not go out alone and neither will you as you share the love of the One who first loved you unto death on the cross to save you from your sins. On the night when Jesus was betrayed, He promised that He would send the Helper, the Spirit of truth to **guide** all believers into the truth. (cf: John 16:7–15) Remember that word **guide**. It’s going to come up later.

Ten days after Christ ascended into heaven, He sent the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, to call people to faith – calling them one person at a time in the hearing of the Good News of Christ, inviting and enabling them to believe in the Gospel of Christ crucified for sinners. (cf: Romans 1:16, 10:17) And we see this with Philip in our first reading this morning.

There’s a tendency to confuse **Philip the apostle** with **Philip the evangelist**. **Philip the apostle** is one of Jesus’ Twelve original disciples. (cf: Matthew 10:2–4) **Philip the evangelist** is first named in Acts, chapter 6, as one of the seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, who

were appointed to serve as assistants to the apostles by providing the daily distribution of food to widows and the needy. (cf: Acts 6:2–3)

When Saul of Tarsus began to ravage the Christian Church in persecution, Christians were scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria. You would think this would be an obstacle or perhaps a devastating blow to the new fledgling Christian Church – but no obstacle is too big for God to overcome. **Philip the evangelist** went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Gospel of Christ crucified for sinners and the Holy Spirit worked through the preached Word to create faith. Many believed and were baptized. (cf: Acts 8:1–12)

You would've thought Philip would best serve Christ's Church by staying in Samaria, but contrary to human wisdom, an angel of the Lord gave him a special revelation, that he leave Samaria's fertile ground of evangelism and go to a desolate region where he would evangelize to just one individual person... to just one man. Every person is important, for there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents. (cf: Luke 15:10)

It turns out that this one man is a court official, the treasurer of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He's a Gentile convert to Judaism who's returning from Jerusalem, where he had gone to worship. As he sat in his chariot reading from the prophet Isaiah St. Luke records:

"... the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over and join this chariot.' ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet..." (Acts 8:29–30)

The man was reading from Isaiah chapter 53, written seven hundred years before Christ Jesus was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and became man, and fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy by becoming our perfect Passover sacrifice as the Lamb of God who was led to slaughter on the altar of Calvary's cross. Having been in Jerusalem, perhaps the Ethiopian eunuch heard about Jesus, but he shares his confusion about the Isaiah passage. How will he ever know what Isaiah means unless someone **guides** him?

In the original language that word **guide** in our text means: ***"to assist someone in acquiring information or knowledge, lead, guide."*** (BDAG, 690) It's the very same word Jesus used when He said the Holy Spirit would **guide** us into all truth. (cf: John 16:13) And strengthen by the Holy Spirit:

"... Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?' ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him." (Acts 8:35–38)

The man's request to be baptized presumes that Philip taught him about Christ's death and resurrection... taught him man's response to God in contrition and repentance, and also the blessings of Baptism. It demonstrates for us the power of the Holy Spirit to work through the Gospel of Christ to create lifesaving faith. It also demonstrates God's love for each and every person in His creation. Why send Philip away from the fertile mission field of Samaria into the desert to save one man – an Ethiopian eunuch? Philip was only an ordinary man. It certainly

wasn't his charm, persuasive personality, good looks, or seminary education that convinced the man. No. It's the power of God's Word to create faith. Secondly, why bother to travel all that way to save one single man... a eunuch who's never going to have a family to teach, confess, and pass along the faith? The reason is – every single person is important to God.

It was neither by Philip's powerful and dynamic preaching nor by the man's own wisdom, reason, or strength that he came to lifesaving faith in Christ Jesus, No. It's by the power of the Holy Spirit working through the Gospel of Christ to create and sustain faith whenever and wherever the Spirit wills. (cf: John 3:8) And that's where you and I come in.

Jesus said disciples are made by baptizing and teaching... baptizing and teaching the Good News of Christ Jesus. You, individually, were given lifesaving faith in Christ either in Baptism or in the hearing of the Gospel and were made a member of the Christian Church. In the washing of the water which was wrapped in God's Word our Lord grafted you into the true Vine who is Jesus Christ our Lord and were clothed in His righteousness and purity – meaning you have been declared clean by God's Word for Christ's sake, who is the object of your faith. (cf: John 15:1–3) Jesus says:

"4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:4–5)

Now grafted into the Vine, you're watered by His Word, nurtured by His body and blood, and filled with His Spirit and you now respond to the love which Christ has for you, by bearing fruit by serving and loving one another. As we heard last week, Christ has shown us what love looks like by His sacrifice on the cross. That same self-giving love becomes the motivation for how you respond and treat others in your lives – your family, friends, strangers, and enemies. You depend exclusively on Christ Jesus and Him crucified for your forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. In Him you bear much fruit.

Those branches that don't bear fruit, God the Vinedresser takes away. (cf: John 15:2) Vinedressers and fruit growers call these branches **suckers**. Allowed to remain in the vine they suck away moisture, nutrients, and strength from the vine. And those branches do bear fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. The prunings are your sufferings in life. In God's gracious and hidden will, He allows you to suffer so that you flee from your false idols and cling fast to Christ crucified for you. Regarding our Gospel text Martin Luther once wrote:

"It is the sole purpose of all the sufferings of Christians to promote our Christian life and to bear fruit for a fuller knowledge and a stronger confession of the Word, a more certain hope, and a wider expansion of the kingdom of Christ. The world, to be sure, intends to do us harm, but it really accomplishes no more than what the church sings about the martyrs: "Unknowingly they lead us into eternal joys." Unknowingly and involuntarily the world leads the Christians through torture and death to eternal joys. Such tortures are nothing else, as St. Agatha said, than taking our arms in a friendly way and leading us to heaven as a bride is led to a dance. Whatever harm is done to Christians by

the world, God turns back their anger and lets the harm redound to their advantage... (LW 24:196–197)

Just as Christ Jesus is risen indeed, our Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are living and active among us in the world today working through Word and Sacrament, creating and sustaining faith, calling sinners to repentance, forgiving sins, and calling disciples of Christ to abide in Him and bear much fruit.

Philip could have viewed the Ethiopian eunuch as a freakish foreigner who was wasting his time, time that could have been better spent in his successful ministry in Samaria. Yet, having been loved by God, Philip joyfully passed the knowledge of the truth to the on to the Ethiopian eunuch who, in turn, joyfully passed it along to Ethiopia as some have credited him with founding Christianity in Ethiopia. (cf: Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible, 729)

You and I now have the same joy found to be at work in our Baptism. Grafted into the true Vine, you're watered by His Word, nurtured by His body and blood, and filled with His Spirit and you now respond to the love which Christ has for you, by bearing fruit by serving and loving one another just as God in Christ serves and loves you. Your good works don't save but your works serve others with the Gospel by creating fertile ground for the Holy Spirit to work so that others know the love of Christ crucified who saves people from their sins.

"¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." (1 John 4:11)

Alleluia! Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.