

New Life

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Date: 22 November 2009

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[0 : 00] Thank you. I'll invite you to look at chapter 8, verse 26. It's on page 120.

We're continuing our series on Acts, and the Saladins did not plan this so that we would hit exactly the day that we talk about baptism, but that line, here is water, what is preventing me from being baptized, is very applicable today.

And we've got lots of water in Vancouver as well. So this is a passage that is really instructive and helpful for us as a church. And as you're looking at that, I want to let you know that a week and a half ago, nine of us from St. John's went to the second annual Anglican Network in Canada Synod. And the theme was God's power in our weakness. And it was a really encouraging conference. It's encouraging to actually see the network in person, in a sense.

And one of the best things about that time together was to hear presentations from 21 brand-new churches and projects across Canada.

[1 : 12] And in those presentations, we heard about God's faithfulness, about God bringing growth to these churches, about God providing buildings, providing creativity to reach people around them with the gospel, providing really great leadership as well.

God is clearly moving in the Anglican Network in Canada. And it's clear that this network is a missionary church, which is what God wants us to be.

This is what Acts is teaching the church. We can very easily become a complacent church, a church that is bound by its structures and very comfortable in where we are.

But God is a God who moves us into mission and by his power to bring his gospel into the world. It wasn't a surprise that many, in fact, I would say most of the churches who presented said that they were studying the Book of Acts in their own Bible studies and through the preaching on Sunday morning as well.

And that, I guess, should not be a surprise because two very strong themes in Acts are that God is sovereign and he rules everything in this world and that the saving work of Jesus is for all people in every situation.

[2 : 33] And God's using his church to bring that gospel to the world. And what this means is that God is sending his church. He is directing both the church and the world so that even things that seem to be obstacles to God's mission become things that actually further the work of the gospel.

And we've seen these things in the Book of Acts already, those obstacles of cultural differences, of big geographic distances, of the church's weaknesses, of the terrible persecution earlier in this passage as well.

God uses these things to spread the gospel. And so what we see here is an incredible movement that God himself directs throughout the Book of Acts.

And it's a movement that is never meant to end until Jesus comes back again. And you see this movement in Philip's life, which is very helpful for us because not only do you see the big picture of the church being moved by God, but you see how does that work in an individual's life.

And so there is great application for you and I individually in this passage. Let's look at a little bit about a background of Philip. He, we first see him in the sixth chapter.

[3 : 52] He's in Jerusalem. He's one of the seven that was chosen, along with Stephen, to distribute food. And he was very involved in the period of growth in Jerusalem, a wonderful time of seeing people converted, thousands of people.

Even priests were converted, an amazing work of God. And you see signs and wonders happening all over. It's a successful time, a joyful time. And in that happy time, God moves Philip through the terrible persecution in Jerusalem.

After Stephen was killed, he's moved to a city in Samaria where he would have been discriminated against. But there he proclaims Christ. Many people again come to know Christ as their Savior. And it is, again, a joyful and successful time. Now, in that happy time, God, in our passage here, moves him yet again.

And he moves him to the last place that he would have chosen to go, to a desert road in the middle of nowhere that is south of Jerusalem on a road that goes on to Egypt and Africa.

[5 : 02] And God often does that with us. He doesn't know why he's going to be there. God has just sent him. God does that in our church. He does send us, not necessarily knowing the future, uncertain, but he is leading us.

He's calling us without showing us the whole picture. God is calling us to rely on him. And immediately, Philip arose and he went. And he must have wondered why as he walked along in that hot sun in the middle of nowhere.

But in verse 27, he sees a man. It's an extraordinary sight. He's charged with all the finances of this empire in Sudan, in Ethiopia, which, by the way, is present-day Sudan and southern Egypt.

And this was an empire, by the way, that the Roman and Greek writers said was the end of the earth. It was the ends of the earth. And so you can see what God's doing here. He's riding along in the road in his chariot and entourage, heading back from Jerusalem.

This guy is very interested in the God of the Jewish faith. And he has gone to check it out, to be part of things in the temple. He can't actually be part of fully included because he is a eunuch.

[6 : 16] But clearly, he is searching. And the amazing thing about this scene is that he has a Bible. We take Bibles for granted today, but to have physically a Bible was incredibly costly.

So he had a scroll that contained the prophet Isaiah's writings. And here's this guy in the middle of nowhere, minister of finance, reading the Bible, and he's from a pagan country.

What does Philip do? Well, yet again, the Holy Spirit leads him. He says, Go. And he goes up and joins the chariot. Now, that word, go, is of utmost importance to the church, to you and I in the church as well.

When Jesus commissioned the church, remember what he said? He said, All authority in heaven and earth has been granted to me. And because that's true, because he is sovereign, what does he say?

Go. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations. And lo, I am with you even to the close of the age. You see, Jesus is sending us and going with us in this mission.

[7 : 24] This is the nature of his work. You see Jesus' heart, his own mission, when he says, I have come. Why? To seek and save the lost.

There is a movement in Jesus to seek and save the lost. And if you are part of his church, you will be part of that movement of God as well.

He's actively searching out people. Now, this is, Philip is helpful to us because what we're going to see is opportunities here to be tempted, I should say not opportunities, but temptations to not go.

There are things in our life that actually prevent us or kind of move against us going out as God's calling us to. And what Philip does is he shows us how God overcomes that resistance in us.

There is a built-in resistance to go because there's insecurity. And I want us to look at those things. First, the thing that can hold us back is the word go can be very, very uncomfortable for Christians.

[8 : 30] we may like it where we are. Our situation may be very comfortable. We are secure. Our ministries fit in well with our busy lives.

And there is something good about being in a place where we're surrounded by those who support us and care for us. Now, the familiar is very good for us.

But God gives us that as a purpose, the things that encourage and we are comfortable with. He gives it as a base, as a preparation for us to move beyond our comfort zone.

We are given this time of security in order to move out wherever we are and to go forth in confidence. And so, Philip shows us that it's through God's word and through even crises that God moves us as church and individuals beyond our comfort zones.

because that is where he will grow his kingdom when we do that. It is also the place where God gives us gifts and he allows us to grow in our relationship with him.

[9 : 39] You see, God doesn't move us to be uncomfortable for the sake of being uncomfortable. He moves us in order to bless the world and to bless us.

Do you remember that is the covenant that God made with Abraham. God made you to give you to give of yourself and your possessions in ways that are costly to do. But in order to do it, it's been clear so far, we have to do the uncomfortable thing.

Now, I don't know what might be uncomfortable for you. It may be God calling you to go serve in a new area of ministry. Or it may be that God sends you to new and unlikely people with the gospel. Those are our neighbors or friends or people you work with who you think are sort of out of the picture. God may be moving you to give of yourself possessions in ways that are costly to you, in ways that might make you feel a little bit insecure.

Or it may be that God is wanting you to go to new places with the gospel. You see, the nature of the church is that God is moving that church and it will involve risk and discomfort that comes with it.

[10:42] But Philip shows us that God overcomes that resistance and helps us to risk as we listen to God and as we have an obedient heart.

This is something that's very prominent in Philip's life. He listens and he has an obedient heart. And so we see that literally Philip is quick to obey the uncomfortable word from God.

He runs up to the official who was reading Isaiah out loud. That was the custom of how that was read. And Philip, who is a bit out of breath, runs up and he shouts to him, Do you understand what you are reading?

Now, it's a bit of an impertinent thing to do. It's kind of an awkward situation, a man in the middle of the desert running up to this great official. But instead of saying, who do you think you are, which might be the logical response, the finance minister says to Philip, how can I understand unless someone guides me?

It's a wonderful line. It's actually something that is an attitude that you and I ought to have before scripture. Very humble, wanting to be taught to learn what God is saying through it.

[11:57] And you know that one of the great, one of the two, two of the great gifts of the church are God's word and also teachers of God's word. This is what we see here.

And we're going to be learning a bit about the Artidzo program today. And certainly, this is what people are being trained to do in Artidzo, to know the Bible and be teachers of the Bible as a gift to the church.

Well, Philip is invited to come and sit up with this guy. And here is where the pressure comes for Philip. Philip's not one of the apostles.

He's an amateur Christian in a way. He's not a highly educated man. And he is sitting next to somebody who has the very highest of educations, who is very powerful. Who am I, he might have thought, to teach this very learned person.

And this is the second thing besides the discomfort that makes it hard for us to be moved by God into something new for the gospel. And that is we don't feel qualified.

[12:59] And I certainly hear this a lot from people. I don't know if I'm ready for something like this. There's others who can do the job better than me. I wouldn't know how to relate. I haven't earned the right to speak into a person's life, for instance.

These are excuses that come to us. And they may be something that we feel are very valid. Philip could have used those excuses as well.

Because certainly the apostles were better qualified. This was a guy who was a different language and culture and social status. Not only that, but he had never met this guy.

So what right did he have to speak into this guy's life? So Philip had lots of reasons not to go up to the chariot, but there is a reason why he went. He went simply because he knew that Jesus qualified him.

And that was more than enough. And I love the fact that Philip and this man are sitting together because there is a similarity between the two. And here's the similarity.

[14:02] The Ethiopian's high status comes from being a representative of this incredible empire in Sudan. And also because of the wealth that is entrusted to him.

Well, in a spiritual way, this is also true for Philip. Philip's status comes because he represents King Jesus. And he has been entrusted with the treasure of the gospel.

With every spiritual blessing that is ours in Jesus Christ, Philip is carrying this with the gospel.

That's what qualifies him. He has God's status.

He has a qualification that comes from Jesus Christ himself, the risen Lord, who is with Philip. And amazingly, you see that the passage that was read from Isaiah 53 is what this guy's reading.

It's about the suffering servant who dies for his people and takes on himself the sins of others. And this man is puzzling over that section in verse 32 if you look at it where it says, as a sheep is led to the slaughter or a lamb before its shearer is dumb, so he opens not his mouth.

[15:13] And in his humiliation, justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation for his life is taken up from the earth? Well, the eunuch says, who is this guy?

Why is it so important that this person suffers injustice? Why would he suffer injustice? Who is this person who willingly takes it? Now, here's an open door.

You can't find a passage in the Old Testament more directly having to do with Jesus Christ. And that's where we're seeing in this story God's sovereignty and his worldwide plan of salvation coming together.

The Holy Spirit has brought Philip to a man who is from the ends of the earth and he gives him this passage and this question. All he has to do is speak.

And the answer to that question is very straightforward. It's like a question in a children's focus talk. Who is this about? It's Jesus Christ. But you know, it's not that easy for us necessarily because this is the third thing that you and I may struggle with as God moves us out.

[16:22] And that is that many of us find it hard to talk about Jesus. You know that Peter wrote in his letters that a Christian should always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is within you.

But there are things that keep us from speaking. We may not know what to say about Jesus or that we might say it wrong, get it wrong when we're talking. We may not want to offend or cause awkwardness which is a big pressure in our society.

And we don't know if it will be relevant either. You know, this is something outside people's experience. Will it be relevant? There is a very strong but subtle pressure not to speak that's in our society.

And the early church actually knew about that as well. There was a pressure to be ashamed. That's why Paul said, I am not ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith.

Now, I believe that this is something that Philip knew with all his heart. And he shows us how to deal with our own pressure not to speak. Very simply, he believed that the gospel was the power of God to save this man who he was talking to.

[17:35] As great as this man was, he knew he needed saving and that the gospel would do that. That overruled his insecurities. That's why he walks through the door that the Holy Spirit has given to him in this guy in the chariot asking the question, who is Jesus?

And I love the way that Luke writes about this opportunity in verse 35. It says there, Philip opened his mouth. That means he was not a silent witness.

When it says that, it's saying, he's about to say something very, very significant. And Luke is teaching the church here to open our mouths. That God saves his people when his witnesses speak.

That even the smallest things that we might say about Jesus, as incomplete as it might be, it is something powerful that can save people. And notice what Philip speaks about in verse 35.

Beginning with this scripture, he told him the good news of Jesus. That was the center of all that he talked about in this Bible study. I wished I'd been there for that Bible study.

[18:45] He started with this passage that the Ethiopian eunuch was studying. And he probably went the verses just before then to explain it, which says that the punishment on this man was for the sins of others.

And then right after, the verse right after says that this person brings peace and healing because of his suffering. And he would have gone right from there to Jesus Christ, who died on a cross for our sins, to bring the healing of the nations, the healing of our relationship with God.

And he rises in great power to prove that he is the fulfillment of all the promises of the Old Testament. Everything this man would have read and found out about regarding the scriptures, Jesus answers and fulfills.

It would have been a very, very exciting time to hear that one-to-one Bible study. And he would have also said that there is a response that needs to be made.

And that response is to repent and to believe that Jesus is Lord and to be baptized as well. And in that moment, again, God orchestrates it where here is water.

[19 : 56] What is to prevent me from being baptized? The eunuch is very excited about that stream. And they go down into it and he is baptized.

Now, without the gospel of Jesus, everything is actually preventing this man from becoming part of the people of God. Everything is preventing him from being in the kingdom of God because eunuchs were not meant to be part of temple worship.

That was the law. He was from a pagan country far away from Israel and he did not understand the Bible. But God in his power brings him in.

Through the good news of Jesus Christ, God's word is opened up to him. It all is made clear because of that person, Jesus. And God himself comes into that man's life in the middle of the desert and he is baptized.

Which means that God brought him into his family by adopting him as his own son, completely and forever accepted by the Heavenly Father. And through the power of Jesus' death and resurrection, he immediately enters the kingdom of God.

[21 : 04] God. This is why it is such a joyful thing for us to witness Caleb's baptism because in fact the gospel is reminding us that Jesus does this for us and he will do it for Caleb as well.

Caleb has entered into the people of God as a gift of Jesus Christ. All the spiritual blessings of Jesus are offered to Caleb in that baptism. And you know, the wonderful thing about it is that at the end of that, this passage, the Ethiopian man rejoices in what God has done.

He gives glory to God. There is a joy that comes to him. He is transformed by this inclusion into the people of God. Well, I want to close by saying that that last scene is really, really important for us as a church.

You know, we sang Be Thou My Vision, Lord as we came into the sermon and the offering. And that last section is about the vision that God gives to us.

You know, in verse 39 where the eunuch goes away rejoicing. Because we are all meant to be about bringing people who are far away from God into the kingdom of God by the good news of Jesus.

[22 : 18] And our greatest joy is to see people rejoice in knowing God as their heavenly father. To rejoice and glorify God forever.

And we especially rejoice when that happens to people outside the church. But in order for that to happen we have to keep in step with the spirit, the Holy Spirit.

God means us to be missionaries, people who are in churches who are moving. I don't know how many of you a couple weeks ago were at Paul Ratsoy's presentation on his ministry to seafarers in Vancouver Harbor.

But he ended up going to the Maldives in the Indian Ocean and he prayed for divine appointments as he put it. And indeed he met two sailors he had met on the ships and was able to talk to them in a closed country that does not allow any kind of Christian activity.

And I think for us in our lives we ought to pray for divine appointments as well. Now this may mean many things. It may mean asking God who are the people that you may want me to talk to and ask him for an appointment with them.

[23 : 34] To pray for opportunities that I can serve Christ in. To pray that God will make an appointment with that opportunity in us. Or it can be a prayer that says how can I give so that the people can know the joy of God's salvation outside our church.

The divine appointment of giving us generous hearts for his mission. Now the great thing about God being our heavenly father is that he knows about our struggles with personal mission.

And those struggles may be the three I mentioned of avoiding discomfort of wanting of feeling unqualified of having a low confidence in speaking about Jesus. There may be others but God deals with all of these as we trust him.

As we rely on him to give us what we need to be sent out. It is really all about God's power in our weakness. It is a call for us to depend upon his gifts and his presence in our lives.

And there are three practical ways to follow the Holy Spirit's lead in our life. The first thing is to pray that God's will and his gifts would be given to us in our life.

[24 : 52] Did you know that Jesus said I hope you remember this that God the Father will always answer that kind of prayer. Remember he said if you know how to give good gifts to your children how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him.

Well the best thing we can ask for is that God would show us his will in our life and give us gifts to be part of his mission. The second practical way to follow is very simply to read the Bible. We say this all the time but when we study it with other believers it will give you confidence to speak. Do you know that around we just found out this week that 700 people more than that at St. John's study the Bible on a weekly basis in small groups.

That's every age as well that are present in this church are involved in small group Bible study. This is very good news for St. John's. It means that we are well equipped for mission of all kinds and I know that God is moving many of you into mission and have done that in marvelous ways as well. This is the best preparation for mission because in studying with other people you will grow in confidence of the good news of Jesus Christ and that will qualify you for mission.

[26 : 15] It will be also the place of strength for you to be able to go out as well. It is the comfortable place that God intends for us to go out from. And then thirdly and finally simply be ready as Philip was to obey God's word to follow the Spirit's lead.

Obey God who is speaking to our hearts and our minds through his word. There is a readiness to do that that is really required of the church and people in the church because our mission as Christians at St. John's is to bring joy to our friends and to those who we live with and work with in Vancouver.

We're not called to be completely comfortable or successful or secure. We are very simply called to go and bring the gospel into people's lives.

So as we go may God give us grace to be in a sense like Philip who's not a hero he is a pattern for our lives. May we also be quick to listen and obey God's voice.

May we know like Philip that Jesus qualifies us to serve him. And may we truly believe that the good news of Jesus is God's immense power to save.

[27 : 33] And God will move us and he will lead us into his mission to the glory of his name. Amen. Please kneel to join me in prayer.

Father God Abba your word speaks to us of how in a time of frightening persecution and uncertainty your Holy Spirit led your brand new church to reach out touch and change the lives of those around them.

People like the Samaritan communities Simon the Magician a foreign eunuch. We are struck at the parallels to our situation here and now.

In our present situation with Annick and the diocese we are indeed and are becoming a new church a new kind of church. Like the communities of believers in Acts we too are in a time of frightening persecution and uncertainty.

And Lord we see and sense your urging us as a body and as individuals to reach out to look out to speak out inviting others in to the warmth and grace of your redemption.

[29 : 04] Here and now in the place and time in which we live we have neighbors who like the Samaritan villagers are outside the true faith or who have compromised it.

We know people like Simon who dabble in and are drawn by things spiritual and supernatural we know people like the Ethiopian eunuch powerful educated who are seeking to understand your word.

Help us Holy Spirit to hear your urgings to reach out to these and others. Empower us Holy Spirit to act on your prompting with words and deeds that speak of your love and grace to those out there. Father God though it is hard and sometimes frightening to live what we're living now help us to have peace in the uncertainty to trust you ever more deeply with our present with our future to lean ever more closely into you and as we do so help us to hear and know your will for us to act on it in the world you died for.

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer. Lord as we look around our world your world on the international stage there's vast need almost everywhere we look Asia Pakistan Afghanistan Africa South America every continent nationally there is levels of conflict in government there is a need for your guidance and wisdom at all levels of government federal provincial municipal here in our own city there are homeless needy people we take this time here now to lift all of these needs up to you Lord in your mercy hear our prayer in our church family we pray a special generous blessing today on little

[31 : 38] Caleb Saladin and his family the day of his baptism Lord in your mercy hear our prayer we pray also for the missionaries that we support in our cycle of prayer for the missionaries we pray for Susan Norman with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship in South Carolina for Heather Bellamy with

Samaritan's Purse in Afghanistan for Yoss Stranghold with Arab World Media in Cairo Egypt and for Jess and Erica Cantillon Jerusalem in Jerusalem guide all these people bless protect them that your word your grace and your salvation may be brought forward to many others Lord in your mercy hear our prayer in our

Malawi St. John's partnership we pray specifically for Bishop Brighton Masala's wife Esnard guide the doctors as they seek to find the cause of her pain and illness uphold her and surround her and her husband Brighton with your care and gentleness we join our brothers and sisters in the upper Shiree in Malawi in praying for your healing and comfort here Lord in your mercy hear our prayer we hold up to you also those in our congregation who are sick and infirm specifically Harold Gail Scott Rosemary Yvette we also hold up in prayer David Short and his wife Bronwyn and sons Ben and Josh

Lord in your mercy hear our prayer and in a moment of silence Father God we name before you those whose names and needs you have placed on our hearts Lord in your mercy hear our prayer and if you would please join me in praying the collect on page 259 of the prayer book stir up we beseech thee O Lord the wills of thy faithful people that they plenteously bringing forth the fruit of good works may of thee be plenteously rewarded through

Jesus Christ our Lord Amen and the order of the service if you would also pray with me on the top of page 8 the collect for grace O Lord our heavenly father almighty and everlasting God who has safely brought us to the beginning of this day defend us in the same with thy mighty power and grant that this day we fall into no sin neither run into any kind of danger but that all our doings may be ordered by thy governance to do always that is righteous in thy sight through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen