

Sermon, May 3, 2015 - Easter 5

## Witnessing Christ from Christ

Acts 8:26–40



Dear Friends in Christ,

I'm excited today, there are a few things that will bring our congregation to a new level in the next few weeks and beyond and we want you to part of it.

We have been looking for opportunities for us the get involved in the life of our community where we would give witness to Christ and his resurrections power.

As you know for the last few years we have been working on a new and renovated vision for our congregation, a way for us to be church, that church God wants us to be. Of course this vision is not new for it is given already in the Gospels and that is to preach the Gospel, to announce the Good News of Christ. That is not new, but that we actively seek God's leading so that the proclamation of the Gospel could really take place among our people, is new, that's our new vision for us. That is not only about our congregation and serving us inwardly but that we be the catalyst in our community so that the Gospel would be heard.

So here are some of those things that will bring our congregation to a new level.

First, as we have done for the last couple of years, the congregational camp is taking place at the end of this month. This camp is going to be an opportunity to bring fellowship and community in the level that will encourage us to continue working for God's Kingdom but also take care of our souls in the ways the Lord would have us do. So if you haven't decided yet to join us we would like to encourage you to consider attending the camp this year, there is room still especially in the cabins. Think about that.

Next, there is an opportunity to minister at Odyssey house. For the last while the board of evangelism, especially Maureen Schadeck has taking upon herself to minister to people in need, especially women. She has gone to Odyssey House in town and look for ways of service, and very soon she and others will come there and pray with the women there, sing songs and read devotions, right there at Odyssey House. No you can be a part of that, maybe by going with Maureen if possible, but mostly you can partner with your prayer, prayer is very important so that satan will not put stumbling blocks in our way as the Good News is being shared.

Then on July 1<sup>st</sup>, we hope to have our Canada Parade hotdog bbq, and for sure we need you there, we need your support, your help, but most of all this is another opportunity to share the Gospel

For sure we would like to get lots of people walking in our Church Service, and our congregation, most importantly we need lots of people to hear the Good News of Christ, for the need is great. But what if we start with one person, what if we go with one person at a time? What if we would share with, or pray for one person at a time?

In the book of acts we do see the Spirit leading a preacher to target one person a time.

The Holy Spirit that brings and points us to the Gospel as the Luther would say in the Small Catechism: “The Holy Spirit ‘has called me by the Gospel,’ that is, He has invited and drawn me by the Gospel to partake of the spiritual blessings that are mine in Christ.” It is the Holy Spirit in full force working through one man in this text.

And in the text of Acts, we see a man from Ethiopia who although doesn't see the Spirit, he benefits from the work of the Spirit as the Spirit directs Philip to minister to that man. And in turn listens to Philip as he shares the Good News of Jesus who is now working in the people He redeemed and saved. Philip as saved and redeemed person was grafted into Christ who is the vine, and so today Philip was a branch connected to Christ the vine, he is able to produce fruits in the way of witnessing Christ who is now alive!

It was so for Philip and is now for us, that Salvation won by Jesus is strength resting on the baptized even when faced with difficult times. During this time of the Book of Acts there was a persecution against the first Christians, so all were scattered, including Philip, but that was not a deterrent for the Holy Spirit living among the baptized.

Philip was one of the seven deacons selected by the apostles, ended up preaching in the city of Samaria (8:4–13) where the Spirit did great things through Philip, then, he was asked to, taken to a desolate region, where he found just one soul, a man in a chariot. It took a divine act by an angel to send Philip, but God would break down his fear even to speak. We read, “The Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and join this chariot’” (v 29). The man was a foreigner from Ethiopia. He had a prestigious job. He'd even come to fear the true God. Nothing stood in the way of Philip speaking Christ to him, and Jesus gave Philip strength to do it.

Every one of us has a comfort zone. Getting outside of it easily exposes our weakness, going to Odyssey House and pray with battered women, or talking to people during Canada Day parade might be out of our comfort zone, but one thing Philip did trust and we can trust too, is that the Holy Spirit of God comforts the baptized and is with you. So we look to the Savior by the promise of the words of those who had the Spirit. In our Epistle, John says, “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 4:10).

Now do you know that our fears in speaking the Gospel to others it is not because our incapacities but our self-centeredness, we worry too much about ourselves, but here too there is good news, because Jesus breaks down our sinful fears and continued failures of self-centeredness as well. His forgiveness in Absolution and given at the Lord's Supper is the voice of good news that gives strength to the baptized. The One who gives life to the world speaks with boldness by the cross for all. We may not meet foreigners, but the Lord sees the desolate places of our family, friends, and co-workers who never hear the name of Christ, the Lord sees the desolate needs of battered women, the Lord sees the needs of those people who although looking cheerful during Canada Day, but deep inside there is a great need for hope and newness of life.

Now, notice what happened here in our text of meditation. Philip had confidence to ask the Ethiopian, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He was not so much looking for an answer but extending an invitation. The man was far from prideful or careless, responding, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” (vv 30–31). In view of

the text of Isaiah, Philip had to explain the confusion over Scripture. It was not about feelings, personal experiences, or opinion, because God's Word had life in itself to speak. The man had questions, and Philip gave answers centered on the promise of salvation for sinners. Since Jesus had said in his Great Commission, "Go baptize and teach" (see Mt 28:19–20), the Spirit would teach through the baptized. We read, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus" (v 35). Do you see what is happening? The Word is life, able to save all such sinners. That's why the baptized teach the Gospel, that's why we learn the Gospel so we can teach it.

Now, here is one thing that we need to have present: as society moves away from education at the center, it also affects the link between Baptism and the life-giving Word. John warns, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 Jn 4:1).

Could lack of education in what we believe as Lutherans say anything about how we speak the Gospel? And how our congregations are shrinking? Are we quiet because we really don't have anything to speak to sinners? You in prayer seek answers to those questions. But as you do remember that we learn as the baptized because Christ loves us, because of His love for each one of us, we are studying God's word fervently, not just reading writings from somebody else, especially who is not Lutheran, but fervently reading God's Word, deeper and deeper. And, what we learn goes out in love to others with God's Word as life for them. Openly teaching why we believe what we believe is the responsibility of parents, pastors, and the whole Church, the Body of Christ, here in our congregation and our community beginning with our families.

Now, here is another word of Good News, Jesus said: "Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. 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" (Jn 15:3–4). Like the Reading from Isaiah, God's Word serves the purpose for all to meet the Savior, Jesus.

And, see what happens when the promise of Christ is fruitful to bring others to Baptism. The Ethiopian man gets baptized. Who knows how long the conversation went on in the chariot? However, what we do find out is that "as they were going along the road they came to some water. The eunuch said, 'See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?'" (v 36). His words were not about how he decided to follow Jesus, willed his salvation, or how much water to use. His interest was in receiving salvation by water, for it carried the promise of Jesus' Word. By his teaching, Philip clearly directed the man to Baptism. It was the very source of life grounded in Jesus' death and resurrection. This adult Ethiopian in all his glory humbled himself to become a child by repentance and faith in Jesus. After Baptism, Philip no longer was present, but the man was not alone. He had the blessing to be joined to the Body of Christ, the Church. He went "on his way rejoicing" (v 39) with life by God's Word, which gave Jesus. What was unknown in his country would now become known.

What Jesus did for all by his suffering and death on the cross bears fruit. The victory belonged to Philip. He passed it on to the Ethiopian eunuch. Now we have the same joy found to be at work in our Baptism. This connectedness comes from the

Word and Sacrament, which still give Jesus. He teaches the truth for all to learn. He forgives the sinner and brings him to repent and believe in him. He promises that there are spiritual blessings in his name. The chief blessing is Baptism, for it has spoken the living voice of Jesus into our lives. This did not happen in some mysterious way, as if the Spirit of the Lord fell out of the sky. It came from those who brought us to Jesus by teaching his Word. The baptized bring others to Baptism. Works do not save, but our works serve others with the Gospel in our lives. Any good fruit always rests in what comes from Jesus. He brought life out of his death, blessing out of his burden, and hope out of his cross. Fruitful witness is alive by the faithfulness of Jesus.

Christ shines during this Easter season with his sacrifice as triumph. Righteousness won by the Savior is now life for any branch baptized into his name. The fruit is simply a benefit for others to share in the same blessing we all have in Christ. So in the promise of the Holy Spirit of the Risen Christ that He will be directing those working at Odyssey house or, at the Camp or at the Canada Day Parade, or even serving in any capacity here at Church or other ministries, let's move forward as the Lord is removing fear from us and leading us into a new level.

Praise be to the Name of the Lord.

Amen.