

Sermon – April 28, 2024 – Easter 5 Pastor Ventura
On The Deserted Road....!
Acts 8:26–40

Dear friends in Christ, grace and peace from our Risen Lord!

In the last few weeks, we have seen how the message of Easter, that Jesus is risen from the dead, has indeed changed lives dramatically. I'm sure that if many of us are given the chance to tell how our lives have been changed, we are going to be here for the rest of the day... don't you think so?

One of those dramatic changes that the news of the resurrected Christ has caused in people, is the story of Philip as per the reading from Acts 8 this morning. And one feature of that dramatic change is his willingness to be led by the Spirit to go and change somebody else's life too. "Rise and go" an angel of the Lord said. Go "towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." Go in "the power of "the good news about Jesus" (8:35) go and change somebody else's' life. And Philip went and did as the Angel had told him.

Now, just like Philip, we, God's faithful people, are also called to go and be instruments of change in somebody's life.

Some time ago here at Faith we had a Bible study on Outreach. And the material we used is called "Joining Jesus in His mission." The premise of the study is that Jesus wants you to come along as he carries on with his mission of rescuing souls, right there on the road of life.

Philip was asked to go to a specific road, but that's all the instruction he got, but once he was there, the Spirit led him to do what he needed to do. Here is a question for you this morning, have you ever heard God saying: "Go, go to this road.." any road... like... to the Muskoseepi park for example... anyone? Me neither. But God is certainly calling us to go somewhere, to join him in his mission, to see what God is doing. And he wants you there at the front, seeing and being part of what he is doing, just

like Philip was. He is inviting and leading us, those in whose lives Jesus' resurrection has caused an impact and a dramatic change.

But are we listening to his call, are we listening and accepting his invitation to go down the road of exciting experiences, are we ready to join Jesus and see what he is doing in the lives of others.

Today we haven an exciting, impacting and extremely great experience in what God is doing and accomplishing, Sadie's baptism. This is an experience that nothing in the world can change. Just as Jesus said that there is always a great celebration in Heaven whenever a sinner repents, so today, the celebration is on, a life is extremely changed by the waters of baptism, and we are so privileged to watch it happening, we are witnessing what God is doing here. This is amazingly wonderful. But... then again, we are here in worship, to be sure, so we must observe and witness it. A simple event, yet it is something that God is accomplishing, nothing of this is of our making, or our choosing, rather it is the work of the Holy Spirit who moved the parents to bring Sadie to be baptized, it us ultimately the Holy Spirit at work, but even so, we are joining him in his mission... but being here is the easy part. Now, how about you go into a solitary road, into a "desert place."? As you see the need is great out there. So, we celebrate now, and we are emboldened to heed the call to go.

But are we listening to that call? Are we paying attention to what Jesus is doing so we can join him? The reality is that we spend our days, mostly thinking about our needs and being on our own, sometimes we find ourselves being in a "deserted road" not paying attention that there are others too in a more deserted place than ours. But being on our own "deserted road" keeps so worried about ourselves only and how we can make it out. That even going to Jesus for help in the first place is something we leave as the last resource. As you see it is hard to listen to Jesus calling us at times, to go and join him in his mission. And so we may miss some very special, even spiritual, opportunities and exciting action from God. You never know what can happen when you're open to being available to

another person. We never know what can happen when we listen to the call of “go” and do something the Lord is leading you to experience.

I say the Lord is leading us to because it always starts with God. It starts with his desire to make his work of reconciliation and restoration known to people. He has a heart for all people.

But the Lord has a plan, always. And in our text that plan includes Philip. Philip was one of the original seven deacons chosen to serve in the ministry of the Early Church, one who has joined Jesus in his mission. And now is being prompted by the Spirit to go catch up with a chariot in which the rider is reading the Scriptures and is going to be on a desert place. And all he had to do is to tag along the chariot and enquire he the rider understood what he was reading. That’s all he had to do! That’s all we must do, being close with someone, understand their deserted road and hear their cry for help. Just being close a person can spark a discussion that would lead to a person’s salvation, doesn’t it? That’s where it happens, along the road of life, in a deserted place.

It’s always amazing how God works through his Word and through people who are open to being used as his vessels. We never know as we leave our home how God may call us to get near to another person so that he or she might experience and receive the gift of God’s mercy and grace. Philip hears the call and is sent to a “desert place.” Philip was being sent to evangelize just one man, just one person. God had a plan indeed!

Here today, we see Jamie-Lee and Kriz bringing Sadie to the waters of baptism, just one girl, one baby, one person. What is the Lord accomplishing? Other than brining this precious soul to life, I don’t know what the Lord has in store for Sadie, but let me tell you that if she remains in him, great things are expected, just as Jesus said: “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit...” (John 15:5a)

That’s how it was with the chariot rider. He happened to be a court official, the treasurer of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He is a Gentile convert to Judaism. He is returning from Jerusalem, where he had gone to

worship. And while riding back in his chariot, he is reading from the Book of Isaiah the prophet, Isaiah chapter 53. He is reading it aloud, that Philip hears what the rider is reading. Isaiah 53 talks explicitly about the Messiah: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth” (vv 32–33). Philip is acquainted with what he hears being read, and he asks the man, “Do you understand what you are reading?” (v 30). The man says, “How can I, unless someone guides me?”

So, Philip begins to explain to the Ethiopian in simple language that the passage is about Jesus and the Good News of his death and resurrection. Jesus was the fulfillment of the person described in Isaiah.

There’s a link between what we see Philip doing and the power behind it, as our Gospel and Epistle readings show. When we are connected to the source, the true vine, Christ, we “bear fruit”—John 15. And the connection we have to Christ is made visible through demonstrations of Christian love and service that John notes in his first epistle. Our love is evidence of God’s person and character, that is, his unconditional love, which gives his Son to suffer for our sins and reaches out to rescue sinners.

So the Ethiopian came to understand from Philip how the prophecy in Isaiah was fulfilled in Christ. And as the Holy Spirit guided him into that truth, faith was created in his heart. To the point that he requested to be baptized.

And now as a baptized child of God, it was just the beginning. There was more to come. The Ethiopian took with him the message he had internalized; he would find others to tell the good news of Jesus. Tradition holds that the Gospel of Jesus Christ was brought to the continent of Africa by this very man.

And God wasn’t finished with Philip either; there was more to come. The Spirit of the Lord takes him many miles away to the town of Azotus, and then beyond. He would continue to evangelize by pointing other people to Jesus.

God isn't finished with us either; yes, there's more to come. As God works in us, we, too, learn to express love in our interaction with one another and our world. God's love is active in and through his disciples, us his people. The love of God was unexpected and undeserved when it came to us. But is that same undeserved love that moves us in the power of the Holy Spirit, to give the same unexpected love in Jesus' name to others who are also undeserving, those who are in the "deserted road."

The goal of God's love is people who learn to love in response to his love. It happened when he chose to come alongside people on his daily journeys. It's surprising how many people of "deserted roads" pass by with people who need a "guide" to be pointed to Jesus' death and resurrection for them.

Who are the ones on the "deserted road" that you know of? Just like the Ethiopian, many people have had spiritual experiences, and many may have questions. Many people have experienced times when false gods have let them down. God may call us to come alongside someone. God may prompt us to listen, to offer care, or maybe say something that would point them to Jesus.

It happened to us. We have all had someone, maybe even many, who have taken the time to come alongside of us and help us to know Jesus' dying love for us. There were things that we didn't know or fully understand. There were questions we had that were unanswered. The Holy Spirit prompted someone to come alongside of us.

Jesus, as the "true vine" (Jn 15:1), knows what can happen as we stay connected to him. His life and love will flow and will produce fruit. Jesus was that Lamb led to the slaughter and was sacrificed for us and on our behalf. His life was surrendered so we could possess life—real, true, abundant spiritual life in him. That day when the Ethiopian man came to faith and his eyes were opened to what Christ, the Messiah, had done for him, he went "rejoicing."

We are called to stay connected to the vine and draw from it so we, too, can share and guide. How will God use you and me? Through our

various vocations, God's love can flow. As parents, workers, neighbors, citizens, spouses, and church members—as we do our things—be listening to the promptings to come alongside. Who knows how God will use you? It happens “out there.” And Jesus wants you to join him there.

The Holy Spirit is always having someone on that desert road to come along and with the saving news of Jesus.

That's exactly what Jesus did, he came to our deserted roads and saved us, praised be to his name, alleluia, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia!

Amen.