

### Call to Worship

Jesus said, "God's Spirit blows wherever it wishes. You hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. It's the same with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

**The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, the church of Jesus Christ, that we may be and do what God calls us to.**

Let us rejoice in our calling to participate in God's mission to the world.

**And as we worship together, let us be attentive and receptive to the Spirit in our midst.**

### Prayer of Invocation

**The morning has broken, Lord. Once more your miracle of time has granted us another opportunity to praise your name, not in word and song only, but through our thoughts and actions. As this day unfolds may we read clearly in the traces of your majesty in this beautiful world that you are here! May we feel your presence strongly to share your good news, not only for us, yet for the whole world. These things we pray in your mighty name! Amen.**

### The Word

Acts 8:26-40

" Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch"

An angel from the Lord spoke to Philip, "At noon, take the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.) So he did. Meanwhile, an Ethiopian man was on his way home from Jerusalem, where he had come to worship. He was a eunuch and an official responsible for the entire treasury of the Ethiopian queen. He was reading the prophet Isaiah while sitting in his carriage. The Spirit told Philip, "Approach this carriage and stay with it." **Running up to the carriage, Philip heard the man reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you really understand what you are reading?" The man replied, "Without someone to guide me, how could I?" Then he invited Philip to climb up and sit with him.**

This was the passage of scripture he was reading: *Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent so he didn't open his mouth. In his humiliation justice was taken away from him. Who can tell the story of his descendants because his life was taken from the earth?* **The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, about whom does the prophet say this? Is he talking about himself or someone else?"**

Starting with that passage, Philip proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him. As they went down the road, they came to some water. **The eunuch said, "Look! Water! What would keep me from being baptized?" He ordered that the carriage halt.**

Both Philip and the eunuch went down to the water, where Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Lord's Spirit suddenly took Philip away. The eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. Philip found himself in Azotus. He traveled through that area, preaching the good news in all the cities until he reached Caesarea.

## Living the Word

*An angel from the Lord spoke to Philip, "At noon, take the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a desert road.)* When an angel or Spirit from God fills your head and heart with a decision that you are looking for, what does it take to decide with them? Why would anyone take a desert road when they could go forward on a better way? Philip's decision to follow the Spirit's request says something about who Philip was.

He is introduced to us in all four of the gospels(Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) as one of Jesus' twelve Apostles. In chapter one of the gospel of John we read this: *The next day Jesus wanted to go into Galilee, and he found Philip. Jesus said to him, "Follow me." Philip was from Bethsaida, the hometown of Andrew and Peter.*

Right away in the next verse Philip begins to invite another to join: verse 45 - *Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law and the Prophets: Jesus, Joseph's son, from Nazareth." Nathanael responded, "Can anything from Nazareth be good?" Philip said, "Come and see."*

The book the Acts of the Apostles, which today's scripture is from gives us a little more about Philip's work after Jesus had died and Philip had seen the resurrected Christ. The beginning of chapter eight gives us this story: *Those who had been scattered moved on, preaching the good news along the way. <sup>5</sup> Philip went down to a city in Samaria and began to preach Christ to them. <sup>6</sup> The crowds were united by what they heard Philip say and the signs they saw him perform, and they gave him their undivided attention. <sup>7</sup> With loud shrieks, unclean spirits came out of many people, and many who were paralyzed or crippled were healed. <sup>8</sup> There was great rejoicing in that city.*

*<sup>9</sup> Before Philip's arrival, a certain man named Simon had practiced sorcery in that city and baffled the people of Samaria. He claimed to be a great person. <sup>10</sup> Everyone, from the least to the greatest, gave him their undivided attention and referred to him as "the power of God called Great." <sup>11</sup> He had their attention because he had baffled them with sorcery for a long time. <sup>12</sup> After they came to believe Philip, who preached the good news about God's kingdom and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. <sup>13</sup> Even Simon himself came to believe and was baptized. Afterward, he became one of Philip's supporters. As he saw firsthand the signs and great miracles that were happening, he was astonished.*

Philip was able to take chances beyond the norm because he had learned to follow the guidance of the Spirit. We are all called by God to do extraordinary work. The Spirit gives us the better choices when we turn there for help. Often we are too focused on what we think we should chose and forget to listen for the Spirit in our lives.

On the day that he took the desert road, Philip was guided to an Ethiopian who was trying to understand the book of Isaiah. Isaiah, written centuries before Jesus, has a fair amount of prophesy about the coming, and mission of Christ, the Messiah. How many of you have on occasion been confused by what you find in the Bible? Philip asks the man if he understands what he is reading and *the man replied, "Without someone to guide me, how could I?" Then he invited Philip to climb up and sit with him.*

How many of you know enough about the Bible to help teach or mentor another? Would you have the courage to follow the Spirit into a situation, trusting that the Spirit would give you the words when you needed them?

Christy Lee, age 20 wrote this in one of her devotionals: "Claim your faith – It is easy to believe what our parents believe about God. It is easy to believe everything we have heard growing up and to forget that other people have different perspectives and opinions on matters of faith. It is easy to hold tight to the accepted beliefs of mentors or close friends. None of this is to say that these beliefs are wrong, but we can't borrow faith from another person = from parents, friends, or even the preacher. Faith must be our own."

Have you ever heard of an Elevator Speech? It is having the words ready to share that take no longer than the time it would take you to ride the elevator to your next destination. I don't know how long Philip's conversation was with the Ethiopian, but everything is moving faster than 2000 years ago so the speech has to be concise and short. Today you could invite them to read the book of Luke. The gospel of Luke wasn't available to Philip, but it is to us.

Why the book of Luke? In the letter to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul tells us that Luke was 'the dearly loved physician.' So Luke wrote his book from a physician's perspective. He also wrote the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, from which we have heard this morning. Both books are addressed to someone named Theophilus.

The Book of Luke begins like this: "*Many people have already applied themselves to the task of compiling an account of the events that have been fulfilled among us. <sup>2</sup> They used what the original eyewitnesses and servants of the word handed down to us. <sup>3</sup> Now, after having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, I have also decided to write a carefully ordered account for you, most honorable Theophilus. <sup>4</sup> I want you to have confidence in the soundness of the instruction you have received."*

So I recommend as part of your Elevator Speech that you invite someone who may be inquiring about Jesus, to begin with reading the book of Luke. Of course it is helpful to be ready to field their questions, not that you have the answers, but just being willing to discuss how you understand and have experienced the book. It is even more helpful if you read it first for yourself...

You already know much of the story. The first chapters are the story of the birth of Jesus. In fact, don't just say 'you should read the book of Luke,' but as an elevator speech ice-breaker begin by asking them if they like the Christmas story? Then tell them they would also enjoy the rest of the story. Chapter three is Jesus' Baptism, Chapter 4 is Jesus' temptations in the desert. In chapter 5 he calls the disciples and we get the beatitudes as the people have gathered once again to hear what Jesus had to say.

Luke continues with chapters of healings, miracles, parables most of which you may already know...It is considered a book, but only has 24 chapters and the longest chapter isn't any longer than those in a third grade chapter book. The whole book can be read in a few short sittings, but don't rush through or you may miss what the Spirit wants to be sure you know is important.

Philip took the time to guide the Ethiopian by sharing how the prophecies of Isaiah had been fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. What happened next is a Holy Spirit moment: *As they went down the road, they came to some water.* Water, in the desert? Just at the right time and in the right place?

*The Ethiopian said, "Look! Water! What would keep me from being baptized?" He ordered that the carriage halt.* In the United Methodist Church I am thankful that we baptize at any age, anyone who has a heart to be baptized. We do invite the Baptism to happen within the Community of Faith, but that has become more and more complicated as we see more and more who aren't active in the church family, but again if the desire for baptism is there, it may be the first step for a family to become a part of the family of Christ.

Then just as the Spirit had guided Philip down this desert road, the Spirit quickly redirected Philip away. The Ethiopian never saw Philip again but he went away rejoicing. Philip only had one chance with this person, to share enough of the good news that could give him the beginning of faith for a lifetime.

Being a Sunday School Teacher, a Confirmation Mentor, a pastor is often a journey down the road less taken. We have to know that we will learn along the way as we guide others. We can only teach as much as we know OR say as much as we are prepared to feel sure of.

What about you? You have worked to fulfill the commitments you made as you attended baptisms? The commitment that you will help guide them in the Christian faith. Five years ago, I made that commitment with

40 family members and friends, as I baptized my grandson, Oliver Reed Hamblin. It was within a community of faith from numerous faith traditions, but we all made a commitment to him that we will help him to know Jesus Christ.

As his grandma, I taught him the song 'Jesus Loves Me' by singing it to him every time I got a chance. He calls it Grandma's song. That is Ok, because he now can sing it for me all by himself. Someday, when he is ready, we will share how important those words really are.

There are more and more adults in our communities who someone committed to, yet they may not have been ready to hear the Spirit calling them until something happens in their life and then they wonder who to ask their questions to. It may be you...I invite you to think this week about what you might be ready to share with someone if the Spirit directs you down a new path.

Good news: even with an elevator speech, we still need and by asking can receive the guidance every step of the way from the Holy Spirit. We are in the last few weeks of the Easter season. Learning how to live into the resurrection means being ready and willing to take the road less taken.