

Text: Acts 8:26-40

Date: Sunday, May 14, 2006 (Easter 5)

Preacher: Rev. Sheldon Gattinger

Church: Zion Lutheran Church- North Battleford, SK.

Grace and peace be unto you from our Lord and savior Jesus Christ!

Today, I would like to talk about God. I want to talk about how He works with us and guides us...How God makes his Holy Spirit present in our lives.

This morning in the story of Philip that we have heard proclaimed to us in Acts, we witness the guiding power of God.

The place in which this story is set is Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the capital of Israel and about 600,000 people called it home during the time of the apostles.

And it is here in Jerusalem during the time of the Apostles that we see what happened to Philip when God's Holy Spirit filled him.

Now (it should be noted), Philip was an ordinary layperson. Philip wasn't a famous preacher like Peter who went and preached a grand sermon and three thousand people were converted in one day. He wasn't like the famous biblical missionary, the Apostle Paul, who went with the Gospel of Jesus from nation to nation throughout his world. Today is the story of Philip and how God's indwelling power came down on Philip, the layman, the lay evangelist. Philip was empowered to talk to people one on one about Jesus Christ and his love for all people.

Philip was appointed a deacon in the church. A deacon was appointed to take care of widows and poor people in the church. So if you were really down and out, you would go and talk with Philip to see if the church could help. Philip was a deacon. He was the social service agency of the time.

At that moment in time, the Christians wanted to remain in Jerusalem with all the other Jewish Christians. The Christians didn't want to go out into the countryside or out into other villages or out into other nations with the Gospel; these first Christians wanted to remain just in Jerusalem where they could huddle together in numbers and safety. They were happy just to be snug and secure in their own little world. So what did God do? God sent a persecution on the church, and this forced them out into the countryside. This might sound harsh, but it was one of the greatest gifts that God gave his early church. For if these early Christians never faced persecution for their beliefs, they most likely would never have left Jerusalem.

The inner voice of God said to Philip: "Get up and go, Philip. Get up and go to Samaria." "Samaria?" Philip asks? "Why would I go to Samaria? The Jews and Samaritans hate each other. The Jews and Samaritans don't like each other. There is prejudice between us. We don't talk with each other; we don't walk with each other; we don't eat with each other; we don't meet with each other; we don't intermarry. Get real God." It is like the Jews and the Palestinians today. Each group apparently wanted nothing to do with the other.

So God whispered to Philip again with the same message, "Get up and go Philip. Get up and go to Samaria and preach the Gospel of Jesus' love to the Samaritans, that God loves the Samaritans as much as the Jews."

For his whole lifetime, from the time he was a little baby, Philip had been taught to be prejudiced against Samaritans. You don't walk with them; you don't talk with them; you don't eat with them; you don't meet with them; you don't intermarry. And God said to Philip, "Get up and go Philip. Go to the Samaritans and preach the Gospel of Jesus' love for all people."

And so he got up and left. God then whispered into his ear a second time, and the voice said: "Get up and go to Gaza." Philip got up and went to Gaza, and there Philip encountered an Ethiopian eunuch. God said to Philip, "Go and talk to that Ethiopian eunuch." And Philip responded, "God, don't you know he is black. He is from the Sudan. We don't have anything to do with blacks. I am a converted Jew to Christianity, but to talk to a black man about becoming a Christian, that has never happened before in the history of the human race."

And the inner voice of God said to him again, "Get up and go Philip and talk to the Ethiopian who is a eunuch." Philip responded, "God don't you read your Old Testament? Deuteronomy 23:1 clearly says that eunuchs are forbidden to be part of the Jewish nation. A eunuch is a castrated person. They have been made sexually impotent. The eunuchs work with kings and queens, and they are sexually impotent so nobody has to worry about them. You have read your Bible Lord; eunuchs are not allowed to be part of the Kingdom of God. I have nothing to do with eunuchs. I have been carefully taught: I am not to talk with them, walk with them, eat with them, meet with them, intermarry with them. Get real."

And the inner voice again spoke: "Get up and go Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch and talk to the black man in the chariot." Philip listened to the voice and went over to the black man in the chariot and asked him, "What are you reading?" The black man said he was reading from the Jewish Old Testament, Isaiah 53, that said the lamb was to be led to the slaughter. Philip asked him, "Do you understand what you are reading?" "No." "Let me explain. The lamb is Jesus who was led to be slaughtered on the cross that all sins might be forgiven. He was raised from the dead on the third day." Philip explained his beliefs and faith more fully to this stranger and finally the black man asked, "What is to prevent me

from being baptized?" And so he was baptized into Jesus Christ by Philip who from his childhood was carefully taught, who from his childhood has been taught to be well prejudiced against blacks and eunuchs. So that is the story about Philip from Acts 8. At the end of the story, the Bible says Philip went to Caesarea.

In the Book of Acts, you find stories about men and women who are filled with the Holy Spirit. They don't have just a little bit of the Holy Spirit that you may get in one hour on Sunday morning. No, these people are filled with the Holy Spirit. Thereby their hearts listen. Their hearts listen to the indwelling Spirit of God inside of them. Being filled with the Holy Spirit, he was sensitive to the Holy Spirit's voice inside of him: "Get up and go Philip. Philip, go to Samaria. Philip, go to Gaza. Philip, go to the black man. Philip, go to the eunuch. Philip, go to your four daughters who are prophets." Philip was being given specific directions from God.

It is interesting to me that in Acts 8:26, the Bible says "an angel spoke to me" and in verse 29 of the same chapter, the Bible says, "the Spirit spoke to me." Was it an angel or the Spirit? An angel is not some strange creature with wings; an angel isn't made of gold; an angel isn't a mediaeval shape from Michelangelo. The word, angel, means messenger; it is a spiritual messenger. An angel is this a mental messenger inside of you from God. An angel is the inner guiding Spirit of Jesus inside of you who is a messenger from God.

I am willing to bet that if we all look to our own lives we will see times when the Holy Spirit guided us. Maybe it was a little voice nagging you to do something for someone, maybe it was a restless feeling that helped to bring about a great change in your life, maybe it is even what got you out of bed this morning and into church. Regardless of how God's Holy Spirit comes to you- I know for a fact that it is active in each of your lives.

We find in this story that we are led by the Holy Spirit into relationships with people who don't know Jesus Christ. This story in the book of Acts is about a lay person who shared his faith with a stranger. This story is not about Peter, the gifted preacher, who preached and three thousand people were converted in one day. This story is not about the Apostle Paul who courageously traveled through the whole world as the greatest missionary for Jesus Christ who ever lived. This story is not about Peter or Paul but about Philip, the deacon who cares for poor people in his church. Philip goes and has a one on one relationship with someone, the Ethiopian eunuch. God's word to Philip was "get up and go. Get up and go to that person and share with that person what you know about Jesus. When we are filled with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus' love, we get up and go to others and share our faith in Christ, what we know and have experienced with Jesus, one on one .

What this congregation needs is all the people here to be like Philip. None of us will be a preacher like Peter and none of us will be a missionary like Paul, but we can all share our faith like Philip. That is what we need: for us all to be like Philip. We need people who understand that God's Holy Spirit talks to all of us. That like Philip, God calls us to the stranger to share our faith and His love.

(Portions excerpted from Rev.E.Markquart-Seattle,WA.)