



United Methodist Church OF GENEVA

Hop In

A sermon in the Spirited Adventure Series by Pastor Rob Hamilton
Delivered on June 26, 2022 on Acts 8:26-40 The Message

26-28 Later God's angel spoke to Philip: "At noon today I want you to walk over to that desolate road that goes from Jerusalem down to Gaza." He got up and went. He met an Ethiopian eunuch coming down the road. The eunuch had been on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and was returning to Ethiopia, where he was minister in charge of all the finances of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. He was riding in a chariot and reading the prophet Isaiah.

29-30 The Spirit told Philip, "Climb into the chariot." Running up alongside, Philip heard the eunuch reading Isaiah and asked, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

31-33 He answered, "How can I without some help?" and invited Philip into the chariot with him. The passage he was reading was this:

As a sheep led to slaughter,

and quiet as a lamb being sheared,

He was silent, saying nothing.

He was mocked and put down, never got a fair trial.

But who now can count his kin

since he's been taken from the earth?

34-35 The eunuch said, "Tell me, who is the prophet talking about: himself or some other?" Philip grabbed his chance. Using this passage as his text, he preached Jesus to him. As they continued down the road, they came to a stream of water. The eunuch said, "Here's water. Why can't I be baptized?" He ordered the chariot to stop. They both went down to the water, and Philip baptized him on the spot. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of God suddenly took Philip off, and that was the last the eunuch saw of him. But he didn't mind. He had what he'd come for and went on down the road as happy as he could be. 40 Philip showed up in Azotus and continued north, preaching the Message in all the villages along that route until he arrived at Caesarea.



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Prelude

Hi, I am Rob Hamilton, Senior Pastor at the United Methodist Church of Geneva. Thank you for joining in the middle of our Spirited Adventures Series as we study the book of Acts this summer and see how the Holy Spirit sends us to the ends of the earth to share the message of Jesus Christ with new people, in new places. So far we've explored the early chapters of the book of Acts. Learning about the Holy Spirit and the recipe the Spirit works in the lives of Christians for faithful living and witness and even how the Holy Spirit empowers us for bold witness in the world.

Today, we're going to see how the Holy Spirit conditions us to act even when moving us away from our comfort zone and into the world through the story of Phillip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. If you've missed out on the early parts of the series, hit up our website or YouTube channel to catch up on this series. As we get ready to dive deeper today, I invite you to share in prayer with me and for me.

Let's pray:

Prayer of Illumination

Jesus,

You, who sacrificed himself for us, Might we be so bold as to imitate you... even for just a moment. To sacrifice our will, our thoughts, our agenda, our plans, to follow you as freely as Philip did. Where possible in our lives, make it so. Use this message to that end. Amen.

Sermon

One of the default sitcoms on repeat in our house is The Office. If you are not familiar with "The Office" it is a sitcom about a small paper company and what goes on inside the office. Two competing salesmen are Jim and Dwight, both of whom are featured in this clip. Dwight takes everything too seriously and Jim doesn't take enough seriously, so Jim is always pulling pranks on Dwight. How this related to our scripture reading from Acts? We'll get to that in a moment but first, let's watch this clip of one of these pranks [[click to watch Office video](#)].

Other than it makes me giggle, I think the point of the clip is the lesson in classic conditioning. I want us to consider that the Holy Spirit conditions us to respond when called upon and we see this conditioning at play in the life of Phillip.

Philip is a minor league disciple, but God is using Philip to do major league stuff. Philip is one of the first disciples





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recorded in Acts that moves beyond Jerusalem and Judea, into Samaria, and then towards the ends of the earth. In Samaria, Philip has been preaching, healing, teaching and praying. Many Samaritans have come to know Christ and have been baptized. The cities in Samaria that Philip visits are filled with joy. But here, at the end of Acts chapter 8, Luke now paints this new scene with Philip starting in Samaria, but then traveling beyond that region, to meet new people; to take the gospel to new places.

Luke, the author of Acts, says an angel of the Lord prompted Philip, giving him very explicit instructions to head out on some deserted road at an exact time. Luke records that Philip simply goes, no questions, no doubts, no wondering if he actually heard from an angel. It's like he's been conditioned to act when the Spirit tells him. Sure enough, when Philip gets on the deserted road he meets another traveler on this road who is riding in a chariot. Turns out in this chariot is an Ethiopian Eunuch who is Secretary of the Treasury for Queen Candace of Ethiopia.



The identity of the chariot rider might be problematic because generally-speaking, eunuchs were non-binary gendered. In fact, eunuchs might have been considered 'unclean' in Jewish practice simply because for lack of genitalia. Additionally, this person is from Ethiopia which is in Africa and perhaps this person would have a darker complexion. We might consider this chariot rider a black-trans person today and this person's identity might be barrier to relating to this person.

But here, Philip a Jewish, Jesus follower is told by the Holy Spirit to converse with and ride in this eunuch's chariot. Luke records no questions; no doubts; no wondering if the Holy Spirit is trying to pull a trick on Philip. Philip just goes. He runs along side the chariot and hears the eunuch reading from the scroll of Isaiah. Now this eunuch must be top notch. One, because he's educated enough to read out loud... most people in that era couldn't read. Two, he's wealthy enough to own an Isaiah scroll (which were usually so expensive it took the whole community to





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own a single scroll for the whole synagogue). And, three, the eunuch is powerful because the eunuch has a chariot to ride in when Philip chimes in: “sounds like you’re having trouble interpreting what you are reading. Need any help?” The eunuch replies, “yeah, I need help. You know anything about this?” And with that, Philip is riding in the chariot.

I’m so impressed with Philip. It’s almost like he was conditioned to simply do what the Lord commanded him. No pause. No waiting for a sign or confirmation. No expressions of doubts, no questions; he just goes. Philip simply knew when the Lord spoke to him through the Holy Spirit (or in one instance an angel). It’s like Philip heard some spiritual bell or ding but instead of salivating like in our clip, Philip simply goes or acts as the Holy Spirit guides him.

In my experience, **it doesn’t take much to be ‘conditioned’ like Philip. One simply needs to get in tune with the Holy Spirit.** To do that one needs to learn to recognize the Holy Spirit moving in them. For me, the Holy Spirit is like a voice that speaks to my heart, sometimes the Holy Spirit whispers past my conscience and I’ve learned to listen to it. Other times the Holy Spirit is like an overwhelming flood of emotions that fills me to the point of overflow. Sometimes, even, the Holy Spirit is a conversation. I’ve learned to recognize what the Holy Spirit does, so when the Holy Spirit moves I’m conditioned to pay attention. I am not always successful or responsive, but I’m learning.

Learning how to recognize the Holy Spirit working in your life is an important step to being a witness of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth, just like Philip. I know other people experience the Holy Spirit in similar ways that I do. Others say they have scriptures that really speak to them; that can be the Holy Spirit. Other’s experience dreams, or find new wisdom, or sense of peace. All of this can be the Holy Spirit, in fact there is little limitation to how the Spirit works to direct us.

One key to discerning if it is the Holy Spirit rather something else like too much spicy food or simply our own desires is to: **test if what you are being led to think, say or do is in line with the character of God as revealed in the Jesus and the scriptures.** If it is in line, it’s likely the Holy Spirit and not the tacos. If the action is not in line with scripture, or you are unsure, it’s best to test your experience out with spiritual companion or guide to see. I hope this helps us understand how the Holy Spirit works in our lives a little better in order to help you become more like Philip who can just hop in a stranger’s chariot because the Spirit told him to go down a deserted road, get in the chariot and share what the Spirit put on his heart. -



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But our Acts passage for today isn't just about identifying the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives - that identifying work is just one step to becoming the witnesses God is calling to be in order to reach new people. Another step after learning to go when called, is to being able to deliver good news. Now you might be quick to think: "delivering good news, that's what you pay me for!?!?" But I promise you that the Spirit is preparing all of us to deliver a message of good news. Good news doesn't always come in the form of a sermon or Bible study. You don't have to know everything there is to know about the Bible. You don't have to have a squeaky clean track record to be a messenger of good news. You simply have to do what the Spirit empowers you to do.

Here is the good news that happened in our story from the end of Acts chapter 8. Philip hops in the chariot and the eunuch wants to know if the author of the Isaiah scroll is referring to himself or someone else. Now the passage from Isaiah that the eunuch is reading is one of five suffering servant passages. This one is from Isaiah 53 - a passage that is often read as a prophecy about Jesus, who-

“was wounded for our transgressions,
crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the punishment that made us whole,
and by his bruises we are healed.”

When Philip is asked to help the Ethiopian Eunuch he didn't launch into some scholarly diatribe. He simply said, this passage is about Jesus. Jesus, who is God's son, who came to earth and suffered mocking, abuse, torture and death, but because God so loved the world - God raised Jesus from the dead, so that all people could be in the eternal presence of God. Jesus life, death and resurrection shows us the extent that **God loves all people. People like you, people like me, and black-trans people like the Ethiopian eunuch, everyone.** Because when it comes to God's love there is no limit, no barrier, nothing to separate anyone from God's love in Christ Jesus.

Can you imagine this Eunuch's joy? The eunuch clearly had a spiritual longing and they spent quite a sum to have their own Isaiah scroll. They felt the Holy Spirit moving in their life but had been told by God's people the Jews that they would never be good enough to enter God's presence, because they lacked genitalia - it said as much in the law of Moses. The rejection of this eunuch by Jewish law, must have felt like God was rejecting this eunuch personally.

But when the Holy Spirit sent Philip to meet the eunuch and Philip was able to say through Christ - all are welcomed into God's presence. The eunuch was



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finally felt loved and accepted. What good news! No wonder the eunuch wanted no delay in being baptized! Quickly the Holy Spirit had Philip baptize this fellow beloved child of God along side the road. Because when you are told your whole life by the authorities on God that based on who you are, God doesn't love you; and when you never fit in anywhere socially, to finally realize - to know in your heart and head- that the God of the universe loves and cares for *you* and calls you God's own beloved child: that's good news!



That's the kind of good news our world so desperately needs to hear. It's the good news the Holy Spirit is empowering each and everyone of us to share. The Holy Spirit is empowering us to bring new life in Jesus name. You don't have to be an expert or professional - you just have to believe in your heart that God loves everyone and be ready to hop in and tell someone that God loves them, that Jesus died for them, that there will always be a place for them in God's kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

I don't know about you, but I'm ready to 'hop in' no matter where or who the Spirit leads us to share such good news. Amen.