

## **Acts 8:26-40 A Spirit led encounter. With Matthew 28:16-20 06/07/2025**

Have you ever been aware of God directing your footsteps? I love this story in Acts of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. This meeting was certainly a divine one arranged by God himself but one that needed Philip to be listening and obedient to respond to God's voice and be used for God's purposes. Last week we celebrated the Apostle Paul at our combined service at St Paul's Bass...today may we be inspired by St Philip, the name of our church in Cowes!

Philip the evangelist is obviously so full of the Holy Spirit that at the end of the passage he is whisked away to his next divine appointment. I have a picture of something out of Dr Who and him being teleported to the next mission! Wouldn't that be exciting...

If you've been reading Acts at home you'll be aware that Philip, along with Stephen had been one of the men chosen by the Apostles to be a deacon, to care for the widows but that along with others he had fled Jerusalem after Stephen's stoning and followers of Jesus were being persecuted. I wonder if the spread of the Gospel and carrying out God's great commission may have taken longer if the church had not been persecuted in Jerusalem – would they have been tempted to remain a holy huddle in that city... but as it was the disciples were scattered. We read in the beginning of Acts 8. (you may like to open your pew bibles p799)

*On that day a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria...Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said. ... So, there was much joy in that city. (8:1-7)*

Like Stephen, it seems Philip was anointed and gifted and was carrying out the Lord's work – far more than just feeding the widows! God had chosen him to spread the good news, heal and preach. And there was much joy in the city where he was preaching and doing miracles.

The next we hear of Philip is later in the chapter – when he was told by an Angel of the Lord where to go and who to talk to. He listened and obeyed. Once he was on the right road – the desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza- he was told by the Spirit to go up to a chariot and stay close to it. This Chariot was carrying an Ethiopian eunuch who was an important official in charge of the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.

The Great commission, that we heard from Matthew 28 this morning was to go and make disciples of all nations – this time God brought someone from another nation into Philip's path. Today in our global world with easy transport we have people from many nations on our very own doorstep....

I have this picture of Philip jogging up to the chariot and running alongside it! He was close enough to hear what the man was reading.

Perhaps in our context today you could imagine the Lord telling you to go into the city of Melbourne and get close to a black limousine carrying an important Government official – perhaps a foreigner – a visiting Ambassador. You walk up close to the car while it is stopped at the traffic lights and see him or her reading the bible – perhaps they are reading a gospel account of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The window is down and so you take the opportunity to ask them if they understand what they are reading. Because this is all part of God's plan (God's Spirit was obviously working in the heart of the Ethiopian) the important official asks you to hop in next to him and like Philip you explain the scripture he is reading...

You can't imagine that? Well maybe more realistically you may sit next to someone on the bus or train on the way into Melbourne and see what they are reading, or sitting in a café, and God may prompt you to speak to them about your faith. Can you imagine yourself doing that? Would we like Philip be obedient to the prompting of the Holy Spirit? I have had great conversations with people on public transport.

Philip is a great example for us this morning. Firstly, he is obviously energized by his faith or he wouldn't be doing what he is doing – he would have perhaps stayed in Jerusalem and gone back to his old job; secondly he has an outward looking focus and is ready to embrace all kinds of people – he is reaching out to a man very unlike himself – a black man, a foreigner, a eunuch – this man was a God fearer who had gone to Jerusalem to worship but who would have been kept from full fellowship with God's people. God sought him out and used Philip to introduce this man to Jesus. How often do we tend to just go and talk to people that are just like us? God may ask us to go out of our comfort zones to speak to someone of a different culture and faith and lifestyle to our own.

Philip knows the scriptures so that he can explain them so that the man understands them, he explains them, so the man is *excited* about what he hears and wants to take the next step to be baptised.

Do we know and understand the scriptures so that if God placed us next to someone on the bus to talk to, we would be able to explain the death and resurrection of Jesus? We are told that the Holy Spirit will give us the words to say, but we do need to read the word of the Lord regularly. We need to know our faith so that we can share it...

God is the one who will work in people's hearts like he did with the Ethiopian but like Philip we need to be prepared to be God's agent – working with him to bring about his plan and purposes.

God had an even bigger mission than what Philip knew about that day. For we believe that this Ethiopian took the good news of Jesus back to his country. He had been baptised and his life was transformed. Through his interaction with Philip he discovers that he is loved and accepted fully as a member of God's family. He was reading Isaiah where in chapter 53 he hears of one who knew what it was like to be despised, one who would suffer and die and heal our wounds. And as he reads on in chapter 56 he hears the Lord saying...

Let no foreigner who is bound to the Lord say,  
“The Lord will surely exclude me from his people.”  
And let no eunuch complain,  
“I am only a dry tree.” ...

“To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,  
who choose what pleases me  
and hold fast to my covenant—  
<sup>5</sup>to them I will give within my temple and its walls  
a memorial and a name  
better than sons and daughters;  
I will give them an everlasting name  
that will endure forever.

<sup>6</sup>And foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord  
to minister to him,  
to love the name of the Lord,  
and to be his servants...

<sup>7</sup>these I will bring to my holy mountain  
and give them joy in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house will be called  
a house of prayer for all nations.”

Philip was able to explain the scripture and introduce this foreign eunuch to Jesus, the one who the prophet Isaiah had written about, the one who died for all, and through his grace and mercy everyone who believes in him could be baptised, receive the Holy Spirit and be a new creation. How wonderful for this man to hear this good news!

This Ethiopian official returned to his country full of the Holy Spirit, excited and emboldened to share his faith, he takes the gospel to the “ends of the earth”. Ethiopia is one of the oldest Christian countries in the world. About 60% of its current population consider themselves to be Christian.

We often never know the result of our faith conversations. There will be times when we are just planting a seed, other times we might be pouring fresh water on a seed that has been lying dormant. And then there may be times when we will be used by God to help bring someone into a new and exciting relationship with Jesus.

I experienced God at work in this way a few years back. I was running Alpha at the Cathedral in Hobart and a young Bangladeshi student who was living in the Backpackers behind the Cathedral came along. He had been given an Alpha invitation flyer from someone when he walked in to look at the Cathedral. He turned up at Alpha on the Wednesday as he had nothing else to do as he was new to Hobart. Seeds had been sown by Christian Union people when he studied at Monash in Melbourne, but he had not come to faith. He was from a Hindu family, a minority persecuted faith in Bangladesh.

God’s spirit was at work and he came to know and love Jesus through the Alpha course. I had the privilege of baptising Naf by full immersion in the River Derwent. Naf found a home and family in the church and volunteers in many ways and as far as I know continues to be excited about his faith.

The Church grew enormously in Acts because Jesus’ disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they took the great commission to share the gospel seriously and they were excited by their own relationship with God -listening to him and being obedient to his voice.

I pray that we will all be open like Philip to be used by God to share the good news of Jesus Christ with people we meet every day. Pray for opportunities, pray for boldness and the words to say. The Holy Spirit will equip you. Who knows who or where or how the Spirit might send us! I’d love to be ‘teleported’ by the Spirit! May we be encouraged and inspired by St Philip today...

We *do* have opportunities in our neighbourhood every day, and we need to be open to share the good news in little conversations as the Spirit prompts, it may be while you're serving a cup of tea or a sausage at the monthly market, serving at the op shop, or when chatting to a neighbour. Offer to pray for someone who is unwell or needs comfort. Pray that the Holy Spirit will also be at work opening people's hearts ready to receive the good news. I believe God *is* at work – let's be a part of what he is doing and see how he will use us to bring transformation and new life to people in our community. In the powerful of name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.