**Acts 8:26-40**

Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place. **27** And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship **28** and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. **29** And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” **30** So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” **31** And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. **32** Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. **33** In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.” **34** And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” **35** Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. **36** And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” **37**  **38** And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. **39** And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. **40** But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

**“Witness To Christ From Christ”**

Grace to you and peace from Him, “who is and who was and who is to come” Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. The riots in Baltimore were more than watching disruption erupt among a community. We already have witnessed such scenes from Ferguson, Mo and other places in the U.S. What made history last week was that for the first time ever no fans could attend a major league baseball game. The Orioles and White Sox played in Maryland, but it was to an empty stadium. As a reporter noted, “On this day, 30,000 Orioles fans had been muted. The wild applause had been silenced. There were no fans to stand for a standing ovation.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Of course, playing the “nonattendance” card threatens the life of baseball just as rioting tares down the life of a community.

Thankfully, God does not leave us in threatening separation from Him. The Easter season teaches us being connected to Christ holds a great promise, “...he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.” (1 John 4:4). The Ethiopian never saw the risen Jesus, but God was at work when he saw the face of Philip. More importantly, listening his voice carried the good news of the Gospel. We cannot separate the *work of* the redeemer from how Jesus now *works in* the redeemed. Philip was a branch connected to Christ the vine, so today, we are in Him by the Word and Sacraments. From the cross now bursts forth the true Spirit of salvation unknown to sinners. FRUITFUL WITNESS IS ALIVE BY THE FAITHFULNESS OF JESUS.

Salvation won by Jesus is strength resting on the baptized. It is silly to think that anyone in the early church went without the water and the Word. After persecution broke out in Jerusalem, Christians were scattered all over. This would be a hindrance to the cohesiveness of any group, but not to the Spirit of God living among the baptized. Philip, one of the seven deacons selected by the Apostles, ended up preaching in the city of Samaria. He also received a special revelation to leave this place of success (Vv 4-13) and go to a desolate region where he found one soul. It took a divine act by an angel to send him, but God would break down his fear even to speak. We read, “The Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and join this chariot.” The man was a foreigner from Egypt. He had a prestigious job. He was even a convert to Judaism. None of it stood in the way. What Jesus gave as strength to Philip by the Gospel was not for selfishness. It was to be a gift for all.

Every one of us has a comfort zone. It easily exposes our weakness toward others, but the Spirit of God comforts the baptized. We cannot take Philip’s experience and make it into our own life. Many things in the 1st century church were miraculous for the sake of establishing the victory of Christ. Today, we look to the savior by the promise of their Words who had the Spirit. In our Epistle reading St. John says, “In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” Only Jesus breaks down our sinful fears and continued failures of self-centeredness. His forgiveness in absolution and given at the Lord’s Supper is the voice of good news. This is how He gives strength to the baptized. The One who gives life to the world speaks with boldness by the cross. We may not meet foreigners, but the Lord sees the desolate places of our family, friends, and coworkers who never hear the name of Christ.

The Word is life for sinners and why the baptized are to teach the Gospel. Philip had confidence to ask the Ethiopian, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He was not so much looking for an answer, but extending an invitation. The man was far from prideful or careless. He responded, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” In view of the text of Isaiah, Philip had to explain the confusion over Scripture. It was not about feelings, personal experiences, or opinion that mattered because God’s Word had life in itself to speak. The man had questions and Philip gave answers centered on Jesus and his life for sinners. Since Jesus had said at His Great Commission “Go baptize and teach” (Mt 28:19-20). The Spirit of the Gospel would teach through the baptized. We read, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.”

As society moves away from education to more entertainment, it also affects the link between baptism and the life giving Word. St. John warns, “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.” Could lack of education in what we believe as Lutherans say anything about how we speak the Gospel? Are we quiet because we really do not have anything to speak to sinners? We learn as the baptized because Christ loves us. What we learn goes out in love to others with God’s Word as life for them. Openly teaching why we believe what we believe is the responsibility of parents, pastors and the whole church who are the body of Christ. Yet, Jesus gives the promise, “Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.” Like the reading from Isaiah, God’s Word serves the purpose for all to meet the savior Jesus.

The promise of Christ is fruitful to bring others to baptism. Who knows how long the conversation went on in the chariot? However, what we do find out is, “…as they were going along the road they came to some water. The eunuch said, ‘See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” His words were not about deciding to follow Jesus, demanding salvation on his terms, or concern over the water. Instead, his interest was in receiving salvation and baptism carried that promise of Jesus’ Word. From his teaching Philip clearly directed the man to what saves. Baptism was life rooted in Jesus’ death and resurrection. This adult Ethiopian in all his glory humbled himself and became a child of God. After his baptism Philip no longer was present, but the man was not alone. He had the blessing of being joined to Christ and His Church. He went “on his way rejoicing” with life by God’s Word that gave Jesus. What was unknown in his country would now become known in Christ.

What Jesus did for all by His suffering and death on the cross bears fruit. The victory belonged to Philip. He passed it on to the Ethiopian eunuch. Now we have the same joy found to be at work in our baptism. This connectedness comes from the Word and Sacrament that still gives Jesus. He teaches the truth for all to learn from Him. He forgives the sinner to repent and believe in Him. He promises life by His Name that has no end. The chief blessing of baptism spoke this living voice of Jesus into our lives. This did not happen in some mysterious way, as if the Spirit fell out of the sky. It came from those who brought us to Jesus by teaching His Word. The baptized bring others to baptism. Works do not save, but our works serve others with the Gospel in our lives. Any good fruit always rests in what comes from Jesus. He brought life out of His death, blessing out of His burden, and hope out of His cross.

FRUITFUL WITNESS IS ALIVE BY THE FAITHFULNESS OF JESUS. Christ shines during this Easter Season with His sacrifice as triumph. Righteousness won by the Savior is now life by faith for any branch baptized into His Name. The fruit is simply a benefit for others to receive and find nourishment in the same blessing we have from Christ. Staying connected is key since life does not come from us, but Him who laid down His life for sinners. Amen. Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, be with your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus to life eternal, Amen.

1. http://www.mercurynews.com/sports/ci\_28013329/game-no-fans-should-orioles-white-sox-have [↑](#footnote-ref-1)