The story of the Ethiopian Eunuch and Philip is one of my favorites in the Bible. It took place soon after the Day of Pentecost, which is coming up in a couple of weeks. When the Holy Spirit came upon them, many of the early disciples were still puzzled by what had just taken place. On the other hand, there was a great deal of hope and optimism of what was to come. While on the other hand, there were still great deal of confusions and fears looming in the air…the fear of safety and persecution or simply just the fear of the uncertainty about their future.

 Many of the disciples were empowered to speak boldly, proclaiming the good news to others, in words and in deeds. They found themselves doing extraordinary things that they had never imagined of doing. They were out and about preaching the word, witnessing their faith, baptizing people, performing miracles of healing, feeding the poor, the hungry, and the widows, just to name a few.

 As the angel of the Lord appeared before Philip calling him to “*Get* ***up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.”*** Without hesitation whatsoever, Philip went and did what he was instructed to do.

 Even though he was not one of the original 12 disciples, Philip discovered his own calling and his gifts as an evangelist and a deacon. He was put in charge of the distribution of food among the needy, the widows and orphans, the poorest of the poor. He may not be as flamboyant or as eloquent as Peter or John, but God chose Philip to speak in **love and compassion** towards others. **Everyone is equipped differently but everyone is called by the same Holy Spirit.**

 As led by the Spirit, Philip came upon this Ethiopian Eunuch who was riding on his chariot on his way home from his pilgrimage to Jerusalem. The Eunuch was an entrusted official to the Ethiopian Queen in charge of the treasury. It appeared that he was a devoted Jew as well while reading the scripture out-loud from the book of Isaiah. Philip, on the other hand, had a family with 4 daughters of his own, whom they were described as someone with a gift of prophecy.[[1]](#footnote-1)

 One biblical scholar noted that this Ethiopian eunuch was **someone who was wealthy enough to ride in his own chariot. He was educated enough to read in the language of Greek, devote enough to study the prophet Isaiah, and humble enough to know that he cannot understand what he was reading without help.[[2]](#footnote-2)** But he was still not satisfied with his faith. He had plenty of questions to be asked but no one to explain to him. He was hungry and craving for solid food and not just milk. It wasn’t by coincidence that Philip appeared in the right place and at the right time, as Philip came over and explained the scripture to him.

 When it comes to God’s invitation towards salvation, this Ethiopian eunuch was by no means any less of a child or a man of God. **God orchestrated this encounter between the eunuch and Philip and somehow they both “made the connection” at this crossroad of faith, not by coincidence, but by God’s divine intervention and providence. They both acknowledge each other’s faith and as brothers in Christ.**

 But Philip had something that the Eunuch did not have. Philip encountered Christ and experienced first-hand the power of the resurrection…the Eunuch had not. Philip was part of the inner circle, while the eunuch was sort of a secret follower looking in from the outside. He was still searching with many questions but with few answers. The eunuch needed someone to explain what he was reading and Philip was willing to reach out to him in God’s love. Philip turned this chanced encounter into a teaching moment in bearing witness of his faith. Philip took a huge risk of faith by stepping out of his comfort zone.

 By the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, not only were Philip and the eunuch able to find a common connection through scripture, but they were able to connect spiritually and fraternally as well. Visible or invisible barriers that once stood among people of different race, language, physical condition, social-economic status, and also fears and stereotypes, have now been removed. Philip did not look down upon the eunuch’s social status, national affiliation, ethnicity, gender or physical competence. But instead Philip saw him as a child of God, a brother in Christ, and a seeker in faith. **God’s love for a fellow human being is unconditional and surpassing all human fears.**

 In the same way through our baptisms, God has extended an invitation to us to partner with the Holy Spirit in sharing the gospel with others, in word or in deeds. Sometimes we may not always know the precise things to do or the appropriate words to say, but trust that the Spirit will show us the way and arrange for these encounters in which we should go, as Philip did. The Holy Spirit will advocate and speak on our behalf not only through words but through the language of love and compassion towards others.

 The road leading out of Jerusalem and into the wilderness can be a treacherous one. Analogous to our faith journey, it was full of unknown fears and even hidden dangers and faith traps. There will be times when we stumble and fail miserably in our faith. There will be times when we need to call out for helps from others…and likewise there will be times when we need to extend our helps to someone who is in needs….to rescue the many wandering and lost sheep that are still out there, as we talked about last week.

 Like Jesus, Philip was not afraid of being rejected by the people, but he was more concerned about the people who rejected the Gospel. Philip was willing to take this bold leap of faith, risking his personal comfort and security, going down the wilderness road that is less traveled. Philip followed where his faith had led him and he entrusted each of his steps with the leading of the Holy Spirit.

 Because of Philip’s faithful obedience, patience, and courage in taking a step out of his comfort zone, he did not see his effort gone to waste. The seeds had been planted by Philip in this Ethiopian Eunuch. Today Ethiopia has become one of the most Christianized countries in the northern African region. With over 63% of the 94 million population in Ethiopia declaring themselves as Christians, followed by Muslim and Jewish.[[3]](#footnote-3) Thanks to the work of many missionary who went to proclaim the gospel in Ethiopia in planting the seed of the gospel and putting their faith into action.

 **The gospel is meant for us to be universally embraced and shared. It is not meant for us to keep as a private treasure or as personal privilege.** **The power of the gospel and the witness of the Holy Spirit cannot and should not be detained.**

 **By the virtue of our baptisms, we have been commissioned as ministers and proclaimers of the Gospel, by words and in deeds.** All of us have our own personal journey of faith, experiences and stories that need to be shared. Like Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch, we trust that God will provide us with opportunity to plant and share our seed of faith with others.

 A few more practical challenges or questions that we must ask ourselves this morning are,

* **What might prevent anyone from responding to the good news from being baptized or come to faith with Jesus?”**
* **Do we, as believers of faith, establish parameters or rules (whether written or unwritten) that hinder someone’s genuine desire of faith and relationship with God?**

 As we read in our story today, **the Spirit does not discriminate against someone’s desire to be saved and to be a full participant in the community of faith, and neither shall we.** Our sovereign God is ultimately in control. Through Christ’s work on the cross, God has already broken down all barriers that divide us. As Jesus said, **whenever two or three are gathered in his name, he is there amongst us. Christ has unified us and brought us all together in spite of all odds and differences, even against all fears, hostilities, and wrongs that we might have imposed upon one another in the past.**

This week, all of us have witnessed an historic and momentous occasion when the leaders of both North and South Koreas met face-to-face for the first time in more than 65 years since the Korean War. Many have been praying that this day would come, when peace would come and the threat of war, the hostility and tension would cease. Amongst the 80 millions who live on the Korean peninsula, more than 30% declared themselves as Christians. Many of them have been praying for this day to come for years. Incidentally the largest church in the world is also in Seoul, South Korea with more than 480,000 members

 Unfortunately due to the many years of threats and military conflicts over the years, the two Koreas have had their shares of differences. Many of their wounds and scars are still fresh on their memory, with many families are still separated and have not seen each other in decades. They pray that their day of family reunion would come, and that their dreams may come true to reality sooner rather than later. Ultimately at the end both sides acknowledge that they are still brothers and sisters sharing the same family, the same language, and the same culture.

 **Actions taken this week certainly took a giant leap forward towards bringing peace and reconciliation in that whole region. They brought new definition of what *Fearless LOVE* means! Both sides made concessions and were willing to sit down at the same table. Despite the past animosity, human hatred, and fears, it proves once again that LOVE does ultimately triumph and prevail at the end. Likewise, we too shall give HOPE and PEACE a chance, with the Spirit of reconciliation leading the way.**

 As our other text that Steven read for us earlier, in 1 John reminded us, **Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is LOVE.[[4]](#footnote-4)** Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers!

 **Friends, God has called upon us to be peacemakers and to overcome our fears with LOVE.** As Easter people, this is our calling and God’s mission for all of humanity today. Let us continue to pray for courage ourselves to respond not only in words and in actions but in truth and in Spirit. ***There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. Whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because God first loved us.[[5]](#footnote-5)***  In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Acts 21:8-9* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Taylor Brown, Barbara *Feasting on the Word, Year B, Volume 2,* p.457 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopia#Religion* [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *I John 4:7-8* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *I John 4:18-19* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)