

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Sermon: Written by The Rev. Karen Joy Kelly
Read by Robert Sykora – Morning Prayer
Sunday, April 28, 2024

Sermon – Year B Easter 5

How can I unless someone guides me?

Acts 8.26-40; Psalm 22.24-30; 1 John 4.7-21; John 15.1-8

Philip the Evangelist¹

- 1 The angel said to Philip:
“Go to a desert place.”
And there he found an Ethiope,
the treasurer to Candace,
Who sat within his chariot
with Holy Writ in hand.
Asked Philip: “Can you, brother,
the Prophet understand?”
- 2 The Ethiope responded:
“Lead me and be my guide.”
Explain the scripture to me;
“Here, sit down at my side.”
Then Philip exegeted
Isaiah’s Holy word.
And preached unto the Ethiope
that Jesus Christ is Lord.
- 3 They traveled in the chariot,
And came upon a brook;
The Ethiope, excited
then looked up from his book.
“See Philip, here is water,”
He said, and stopped his steed!
“What can now,” he implored him,
“My baptism impede?”
- 4 Saint Phillip told the Ethiope:

¹ from Lift Every Voice and Sing hymnal, p. 50

“Believe with all your heart;
And God the Holy Spirit
Will His own gift impart.”
“I do believe that Jesus
Is God’s true, only son.”
And with these words, the treasurer
A greater treasure won.

These words, written by the Rev. Dr. Harold T. Lewis in 1992, were set to the hymn tune *Nyland* and included in the Episcopal Hymnal *Lift Every Voice and Sing II*. They partially set the stage for this morning’s homily.#

He was very tall ... maybe 6’4”. He was very dark skinned. He was almost reedy in appearance ... very slender, gaunt, serious.

I smiled and extended my hand in greeting and introduced myself.

“Titus,” he said to me. “My name is Titus Baraka”.

“Titus, like the book in the Bible. And Baraka, which means ‘blessed’ in my language.

And thus, I was introduced to a very special person that first day of my middler year at Western Theological Seminary in Holland. While being a “reformed” seminary, it annually brought at least two African Anglican pastors for a year of study for missional ministry.

I had sought out Titus, as I was very excited about having a brother “Anglican” in our midst. Titus is Sudanese. I believe that we are all painfully aware of the horrendous atrocities that took place in war-torn Sudan today.

Titus, as a boy along with his family, walked from the Sudan to Uganda to begin a new life. The short version of the story is that Titus, the blessed one by God’s call, became an Anglican priest. He has a wife named Mary, and together they had 8 children and 4 or so more that they had adopted due to parents dying of AIDS. While I cannot recall all of the names of all of his children, I do recall the names of Liberty, Freedom, Justice and Joy, among them. They lived in a one room home.

The more I got to know Titus, the more he relaxed. At one seminary service he declared that he did not understand how we Americans could possibly stand so still when we were singing praises to God. We needed to dance! And dance we did!

I cannot hear the story about Phillip and the Eunuch without automatically remembering Titus, a living example of the Living Word in our modern day.

You see, Titus, as a priest, was called to work with a rag-tag collection of soldiers back in the Sudan ... to bring the good news of Christ to them.

The arena in which he worked was grim. The soldiers had no idea why they were fighting. They had been recruited and did what they were told. The war and atrocities had been going on for a very long time. With no vision they had lost hope and they were committing suicide at an alarming rate.

Titus spent his time praying with them and telling them of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. By his very being, Titus modeled Philip as he heard the Holy Spirit guiding him in this ministry.

Before very long, Titus had many followers - young men who began to see hope in Jesus. They realized the love of Christ and finally had a reason to live.

At one point, several came to Titus and asked if they could be baptized. Titus responded, "Find me some water and you will all be baptized right now."

Water was located and at that very hour, he baptized about 200 young men whose lives were changed forever.

Lives changed just like the Eunuch was changed by Phillip's following the Spirit, reaching out to the "other" that very day.#

"How can I unless someone guides me?" the Eunuch asked.#

We, too, are called to listen for that same question. "How can I unless someone guides me?" Who might be asking that very question of you. And what might you say to them? Who are you today as a member of the "Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement" (as our beloved presiding bishop Michael Curry calls us)? Are you prepared to be that mentor? What do *you* need in order to do this?

It is up to each and every one of *us* to do what *we* can to understand who we are, whose we are and why we are. As alluded to in our gospel this morning, you (not just clergy) are called to move from vine to branch, pruned and primed, ready to nurture new branches. As we abide in the vine we know as Jesus the Christ we become more confident of who and whose we are. With one hand we will be connected to our source ... the one who created us ...and with the other we will reach out to others in our community through our being, our service and our invitation to share the love we have been given. And we will reach out e-s-p-e-c-i-a-l-l-y to anyone not like us ... because that's what we are called to do.#

As the Spirit spoke to Phillip and to Titus, the spirit speaks to you, lovingly encouraging you, strengthening you to do the same ... to be prepared to go out of these doors to share our stories of faith with those who ask and to love and serve those who don't.

Consider the words of this morning ... being vines on branches and being pruned. Consider that we are continually being "pruned", that we have been given time to consider what a changed world ... a world of God's choosing might look like. We will never return to the past sense of normal. Something new is emerging. A new normal. Consider viewing this new normal through God's eyes, through

Jesus' resurrection and what the new normal must look like. And then, consider, as followers of Jesus, how you must be and what you must do in this new time.

Abide in him. Abide in each other through him. And reach out beyond our doors to others who need you as much as you need them to be reconciled, healed and whole, for that is God's intended purpose. Salvation is in your hands.

5 O Philip, the evangelist
You brought to Afric's seed
The Gospel of our Savior
In thought, and word and deed,
O may we share Thy fervor
And press on towards the prize;
And heed our Lord's commission
To teach, preach and baptize.

And so, dear friends, go and do likewise.
Alleluia! Christ is Risen! Thanks be to God. Amen.