

Acts 8:26-40 (Fifth Sunday of Easter—Series B)**“Opportunity”****Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield, CT****May 2, 2021**

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Our text is the First Reading from Acts 8:

²⁶ 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?” 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.

In fifth grade social studies, my daughter has started a unit on the American Revolution. She’s dug out our DVDs of the 2002-2003 series *Liberty’s Kids* and has been enjoying those episodes. Benjamin Franklin is voiced by none other than Walter Cronkite. So in the spirit of 1776, I have a Ben Franklin quote for you this morning: “To succeed, jump as quickly at opportunities as you do at conclusions.”

Philip was one of the seven deacons elected in Acts 6 to serve and to support the apostles’ ministry of preaching the Word of God. Following the execution of Stephen, another deacon, a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem broke out. A man named Saul was “ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women

and committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3). The church, except for the apostles, scattered throughout Judea and Samaria. And those who were scattered went about preaching the Word! As Ben Franklin also quipped, “Out of adversity comes opportunity.” The persecution of the Jerusalem church was an opportunity—an opportunity for the people of God in Christ to be His witnesses in Judea and Samaria, just as the Lord Jesus said right before His Ascension.

Philip’s first opportunity was in a city in the region of Samaria. He proclaimed Jesus to the people. We read in Acts 8:6-7, “And the crowds with one accord paid attention to what was being said by Philip, when they heard him and saw the signs that he did. For unclean spirits, crying out with a loud voice, came out of many who had them, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed” (Acts 8:6–7 ESV). Think about what might not have happened if Philip didn’t use this opportunity to share the Good News of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins! By the power of the Holy Spirit, the Samaritans heard the Gospel—the good news about the reign of God and the name of Jesus Christ—and they were baptized! If Philip had neglected this opportunity while being scattered from Jerusalem, the people wouldn’t have heard. “And faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the Word of Christ” (Rom 10:17).

Philip’s next opportunity wasn’t a result of the persecution. He had a divine appointment set up for him on the 47-mile road that went from Jerusalem to the city of Gaza on the Mediterranean coast. “Arise and go south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem into Gaza. This is a desert road.” Doesn’t sound like a very social place in which to share the Good News of Jesus’ death and resurrection like Philip was able to do in populous Samaria.

But had Philip not gone, this Ethiopian, who was in charge of all of the Ethiopian queen's treasures, wouldn't have heard about Jesus. The Ethiopian wouldn't have the Gospel preached to him so that the Holy Spirit could use the Word to create saving faith in Christ and deliver to him forgiveness of sins through the Gospel and the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. If Philip had not gotten up and went, this divine appointment and opportunity would have been lost, and likely, the Ethiopian's salvation too. Although the Ethiopian believed in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he didn't know Jesus Christ, the Savior, by faith. And, as we heard last Sunday, salvation from sin and death is found exclusively in Jesus.

Philip received this divine appointment from God. Here was an opportunity for the Gospel! He went and preached a sermon about Jesus Christ, the Suffering Servant of the Lord, who so recently was led like a sheep to the slaughter of the cross to suffer and to die for the sins of the world winning the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is the One whose life was taken from the earth in the death of the cross only to rise again on the third day in victory over death. What an opportunity for Philip to proclaim the Good News, the Gospel—exclusively Jesus!

The Holy Spirit, through that message of Christ, created saving faith in the heart of the Ethiopian. He came to faith in Jesus as His Lord and Savior and, when they came upon some water, desired to be baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. How could the Ethiopian go on his travels any other way but rejoicing?! He had received from God the Holy Spirit saving faith in Jesus Christ. He received forgiveness of sins and eternal life through the Word and Baptism. This was a life-changing, life-saving day for

this man because God set up a divine appointment and His servant Philip used the opportunity to proclaim the Good News about Jesus.

God the Holy Spirit also sets up opportunities and divine appointments for you and me as disciples of Jesus in order that we might proclaim the Good News of the Savior. He gives us the Word of the Gospel to share with others so that you, the Baptized, might bring others to baptism. And isn't that the Great Commission, to make disciples by baptizing and teaching? So our Lord allows us these divine appointments and opportunities to speak the message of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins to others. But do we, like Philip, use those opportunities?

By the power and grace of the Holy Spirit, we pray that we may more consistently use the divine opportunities presented to us to share the Gospel. We pray that the Holy Spirit would enable us to overcome reasons why we may not take the opportunities God gives us to speak His Word. Could lack of education in what we believe as Lutherans say anything about why we would not be as likely to share the Good News? Are we fearful that we won't "say it right"? Perhaps we don't say anything because we think that we don't have anything worthwhile to say?

The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation! Absolutely we have something more than worthwhile to say. We have the Gospel that even the most uneducated believer can share: "Jesus Christ, God's Son, loves you so much that He died on a cross and rose again from the dead to save you from sin and death. He forgives you and gives you eternal life as a free gift." That's it. It's just that simple. That's what we are told Philip did. "Beginning from that Scripture he proclaimed good news to him, namely Jesus." Philip wasn't college or

seminary trained. He never took a class on preaching or outreach. By the power of the Holy Spirit at work in Him through the Gospel, Philip simply shared the Good News about Jesus. And the Holy Spirit did the rest.

It is the same for you and me. We know the Good News of Jesus who is true God and true Man. He suffered, died, and rose again for us, winning our forgiveness and eternal life, overcoming death and the devil for us. By the Spirit's work through the Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, we have faith in Jesus. We receive from His means of grace forgiveness, life, salvation, and the strengthening of our Christian faith. And that's enough. That's just what we need to share with others who do not yet know the Lord Jesus by faith. As you tell the Good News of Jesus, God the Holy Spirit is using that Gospel message to create faith in the heart of the person who hears. You are the means of the Means of Grace! You are the carriers of the Gospel to your family, friends, and neighbors. You are the ones for whom the Lord sets up divine appointments and opportunities for you to share the Gospel. And the Spirit does the rest.

"To succeed, jump as quickly at opportunities as you do at conclusions." God grant us many opportunities as individuals and as a congregation to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness and life He won for the world through His cross and resurrection. Amen.