

Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church
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Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 8:26-40

²⁶Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." ³⁰So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. ³²Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: "Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth. ³³In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth." ³⁴The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" ³⁷ ³⁸He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. ³⁹When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

John 15:1-8

¹"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. ⁵I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. ⁷If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

"Her Moment! Her Place!"

Ah, Mother's Day. Here it is again. I am always intrigued by this day on the calendar as it really is more of Hallmark Card event than it is a liturgical one. It also captures my attention that the Hallmark view of motherhood is very different from the real life lived view of motherhood and mothers.

Not every mother is card worthy. Not ever mother is even present. Not everyone who wants to be a mother is able to be a mother. There are

a whole lot of gaps between reality and the gushy glittery 4.99 card that is sold with the Happy Mother's Day message.

Regardless, this is Mother's Day. I am thinking about the role of women and the role of parenting children in this world and the challenges that apply therein for the current generations. I also have come to realize that in a very real way serving in the role of parent is not limited to those who have given birth or those who have provided DNA to father children.

In a very real way all of us are called to nurture those sensitivities that are necessary in order to parent the children of this age. Each of us has a responsibility to cultivate those aspects of our being that are hospitable to helping this next generation to find their way. So often I see that we are losing sight of the reality that we exist in community and that we need to nurture those skills and aspects of character that value the communal over the rugged individual.

The issue has to do with what I'm calling sensitivity. Today I'm going to say that this sensitivity Christian parenting is also a sensitivity that each of us needs as we negotiate the realities of living in this often hostile and fearful world. The first sensitivity I see is that of the moment and the second is that of placement.

Its about the moment. The moment counts!

There is this wonderful story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Here is Philip on his way one way and the Spirit of the Lord prompts Philip to get up and "go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." It is a deserted road. Philip follows that prompting inside of him to go on that way.

Along the road he encounters this Ethiopian eunuch. This person is traveling in a chariot, clearly of some status—and that is clear not only because of the chariot but also because he is in possession of a scroll of the book of Isaiah. Remember this before printed text so some scribe had hand copied each and every letter contained in the manuscript. To possess one meant that you were someone.

In traditional custom of the day he was reading it aloud. Silent reading did not become the normative way until much later. In the ancient world to read something, one audibly spoke the words. So as the eunuch is traveling he is reading the words of the Suffering Servant Song when Philip approaches.

The spirit prompts Philip to join the man in the chariot and the man answers Philip's inquiry about whether he understands what he is reading with the rejoinder, "How can I understand, unless someone guides me?" Of obvious clarity to us, the Holy Spirit has provided Philip as the means to clarity and one who is to guide the eunuch as to the meaning of Isaiah Suffering Servant Song.

Philip tells him that this is about Jesus of Nazareth. The eunuch's response is one of faith. His question is, "What is to prevent me from being baptized?" And the clear answer is, "absolutely nothing." So when they encounter the water, the chariot comes to a halt, and Philip baptized the eunuch.

As they emerge from the water, we are told "the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing." Philip ends up at Azotus.

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This chain of events was not Philip's plan. This was not something he could envision. This was not a plan that he could have conceived of. Philip

had not met the man before this, he did not know he was traveling on the road, and Philip did not know until the incident took place that he would be performing the Sacrament of Baptism on that dusty road.

This chain of events was not Philip's plan. Philip had to be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit in order to end up in the right place at the right time for all of these events to come about.

Philip was sensitive to the moment. We are called to such sensitivity of the moment as well. It is more than being in the right place at the right time. There is more than coincidence going on here. It is a discerning of the Spirit, it is a sensitivity to the moment.

It is an aspect of motherhood, of womanhood, of personhood that we are all called to have. It is that sensitivity to the moment. There is a view of time here, of the moment that is important for us to be tuned into.

There are really two views of time. In Greek, which is the language of the Bible there are two views of time. One is called chronos time and the other is called kairos time. Chronos time is kind of time where one minute follows after another, where one day follows after another, where months, and year, and decades and even eons pass one after the other.

Kairos time is different than that. It is about recognizing that a particular moment in time is of great significance. It is about the concept that there are opportune moments.

Philip was aware of kairos time. He got it that he might be scheduled to go one way on the road but when there was that feeling inside of him that he had better go another way and take the deserted road—he followed that. It was an awareness that in that moment something larger than he and his plan was happening.

What kind of time are you living? Are you clicking away the days and hours? Are you aware of those times when the prompting come along and then do you follow them? Are you aware that God gives you these kairos moments that you should pay attention to.

I think it is sort of like having children. You develop a sensitivity, to kairos moments. I love to see new parents. Brand new parents who have never had a child before, they are so...well, they have so much to learn. They tend to think that you can schedule things. They tend to think that you can plan.

Hey, if there is anything that about three months with a baby will teach you is that you don't schedule or plan—you are not in the driver's seat. The child changes all that. You are not in the driver's seat.

That is the concept of kairos moments—that we are not in the driver's seat. As resurrection people we are called to this sensitivity of time within time where there are these moments that count. There are these moments that are of more significance than any other moments, and we had better pay attention to those moments. Those kairos moments are gifts from God. Those kairos moments are the movements of the Living Christ and the Holy Spirit in our daily existence.

Attend to those moments. Give into them. Welcome them. Know that they are there. Chart your kairos moments and give God acknowledgment that you recognize that moment as such.

Develop your sensitivity to kairos moments. Philip could have ignored that prompting inside of him. It could have been that question, that flash of thought—he could have disregarded it. He could have done that, but he did not. He was sensitive to it and he gave himself into it. It was a kairos moment.

So live your kairos moments.

That timing of it all counts.

It is the wisdom of the mother that is in each of us.

It is that same wisdom, that same sensitivity that helps us to know our place. Where is our place?

Oh, there is this incredible text from the Gospel of John and there is a Word from the Lord for us here. Jesus is speaking to the inner circle. He is speaking to the disciples. And I see this as the Lord's way of reminding us what we know but need to hear over and over and over again because we so easily lose sight of it.

We forget where our place is. We lose sight of where we belong.

The image is that of the vine and the branches. That they are so intricately and intimately connected. The way Jesus puts it is this: "Abide in me as I abide in you."

It is that abiding in Christ that is our place. That is where belong. And all the other places that we find ourselves need to be checked by the reality of is this a place where I am abiding in Christ? Is this a place for me that I am connected to the true vine?

I want to talk about that concept of abiding. "Abide in me as I abide in you."

I think when we hear that word what it conjures up in our minds is the picture of some sweet little country cottage in the woods on a hillside where we are ah so at peace. It is that place where we breathe the refreshing air of trees and river and nature. There is no pollution there and life is good. To abide.

Yes, to abide. It is to have that experience of being in this wonderful place. That is not quite it. That is not the meaning that Jesus has in mind when he says “abide in me as I abide in you.” See this is that vine metaphor in full play. The verb here is meno – it means to hang on, to stay in place, to hold out, to endure.

That is a far more rugged meaning. It is less tranquil and real. It is less quiet and more true to life. The issue here is do we know where we belong?

Where do we belong? Connected to the true vine. Connected to Christ—that is where we belong. “Abide in me as I abide in you.”

Will we endure? Will we hang on? Will we hold out and stay in place? That is the issue.

We need to nurture that sensitivity that the world will pull us away from that place where we really need to be in a heartbeat. There are all kinds of things that can have and take our attention away from us in this world...and will we allow that?

“Abide in me as I abide in you.”

I watch it in the grocery story. And I am told that it is because I don't have children that I don't understand. There are these kids who beg their parents for something that they want. And they keep on nagging after Mom or Dad has already said no.

You can almost predict which ones will say yes and which ones will say no. It is far easier to give in. It is far easier to just let the kid have what he wants and be done with listening to it. But, once you have said no and then you give in—what does that tell the child.

You see it becomes a test of wills. It becomes a test of endurance. The parent that endures and stays the course—that parent teaches their child about respect, and ultimately about love.

But it is hard. It is hard work to endure the begging and it would be easier to just give in.

You see, that is our lives here too. But get it...in the grocery store, we are not the parent—we are the child. We want it to go easy and to go our way.

Want what we want when we want it and we want it our way. But that way ultimately is not the most powerful, or the most loving, or the way things are to be. Our call is to abide. Our call is to hang in there and to endure and to bear fruit.

Bearing fruit is what results when we are so connected to the true vine. Amen.