

Fifth Sunday of Easter  
Sermon Text: Acts 8:26-40  
Related Text: John 15:1-8  
Date Preached: May 10, 2009

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed. Alleluia.

Yes, the Easter season is continuing. We continue to unwrap the meaning of Jesus resurrection. As we delve into what it means to believe that Jesus died and rose, sometimes we need some help. What we need at times in our lives is a guide.

Think back to a trip you may have taken. Some have been blessed to go to the Holy lands. I myself have traveled to synod and churchwide events. One of the things I have found myself and from listening to the stories of others is that the experiences have gone much more smoothly when you've had someone to guide you.

Look at our story from Acts this morning. Philip is called by God and sent to this traveler who is trying to make sense out of what he is reading. The traveler, an Ethiopian eunuch, reads the words, but fails to see to whom this passage from Isaiah refers. "How can I understand, unless someone guides me?"

Now, there is more to this dilemma than the Eunuch's not understanding. The dilemma is that as a result of his brokenness he is an outcast. He has no community to turn to that will help him understand this faith that is emerging within him.

Philip's role and calling at this particular time is to guide the eunuch. In guiding him, Philip helps him understand that this refers to Jesus of Nazareth.

We don't know how long Philip spent with the Eunuch. It may have been an hour. It may have been a day. It may have been longer.

In guiding this Eunuch, Philip goes beyond simple sharing of information. He helps make sense of information. Over however much time it took, the reality is that the Eunuch does come to an understanding.

Such understanding leads him to a desire to be baptized. But for this Eunuch, he wants more than to simply be baptized. He wants to be part of a community where this faith that is emerging in him can grow, be nurtured and nourished, and where he will feel lifted up. What he desires is to be part of the church.

I wonder how many people today struggle to understand Scripture who are not part of a congregation. Perhaps these are people who have not been raised in a church environment. Some people struggle to make the connection between faith and having that faith nurtured in the church.

This is what we as members of St. Paul's have to offer. We offer a place where people are welcome. We offer a place where your faith will be nourished. In our minds and hearts, this is a place where we belong, where we are accepted and loved. This is a place where our faith is nourished.

But like Philip we as disciples of Jesus are deliberately sent out to be guides for individuals long before they step foot inside our church door. We can serve as guides as we share how our faith impacts our daily life, or how our faith gives us strength when we struggle with difficult decisions or fearful moments.

Sharing our faith is not simply something we do by talking. Sharing our faith leads us to act on behalf of others. We advocate for justice because we are a people of faith. We respond to the needs of the poor with gifts of food, clothing and specifically needed items for places such as Glade Run and the Bethesda Children's Home. We share our faith by being

present among those who are hurting and grieving if only to provide a listening ear.

This is not to say that we do this perfectly. We may miss opportunities to guide others. We may not have all the answers to every question. We may even slip up ourselves.

The blessing of the community of Christians called the church is that we have a place in this community where we can ask questions. There is a place where we are forgiven of our wrong doings. There is a place where we can rely on the collective wisdom of Scripture and nearly two thousand years of Christian history. That place is where we gather. Often times it is here, on the hill.

In our congregation one of the many people who serve as guides are our confirmation mentors. Yes, we have teachers who impart the knowledge. In many ways they act as a guide to helping us know what we believe. Our mentors take this a step further and help relate what our confirmands learn to how it impacts their life.

This is but one example of the wider mission of the whole church. As Christians claimed by God and sealed with the Holy Spirit, we are given the ability

to help others understand the core of our faith even as we ourselves continue to grow and learn.

Just as God intervenes for the Eunuch through Philip, God intervenes in the lives of the spiritually young through us, who have been nurtured in faith. God also continues to guide us in faithful living, experiencing his grace and love along the way.

AMEN.