

April 29, 2018
Sermon for Fourth Sunday of Easter
St Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Acts 8:26–40

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Acts 8:26–40 (ESV)

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.

Grace, Mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Most small towns have different local celebrations. Crafty people and merchants haul their merchandise onto the sidewalks; there are special parades, contests, and art shows; people are encouraged to celebrate the town's history or some other event or excuse to have a celebration. Some people, though, never get very excited about events distant in time and significance.

A lot of our other celebrations are like that too: things done at set times during the year, whether people feel like a party or not.

Birthdays, anniversaries, legal holidays—sometimes the observances are simply tiresome. Sometimes the events are worth celebrating, but we've celebrated so often, or so routinely, that it doesn't seem like a big deal anymore, and we have lost the joy of the moment.

Easter can be like that. We know that our Lord's resurrection is wonderful and worthy of our celebration. But we celebrate every year, with many of the same traditions, often without regard for our personal struggles, to say nothing of the early hour of the sunrise service. Yes, Christ is risen, but we heard that last year, same celebration, different year. Christ is risen, but the marriage is still in trouble. Christ is risen, but the boss is giving me trouble at work. Christ is risen, but does any of this talk of forgiveness and new birth really make sense to me anymore? Christ is risen, but life is so exhausting . . . demanding . . . meaningless . . . boring.

The Ethiopian is caught in the tension between "what ought to be" and "what is."

You aren't the Lone Ranger here. This was faced right after Jesus' resurrection.

"What ought to be" is a life of joy, due to the Old Testament promises of God in the coming Savior. We should all get along, after all, we are all worshipping the same Savior, Jesus Christ! However...

"What is" is life seemingly as a second-class citizen in the kingdom of God, confusion over the intention of God and the meaning of His Word, and a return to the difficult (and pagan!) life that is the Ethiopian's earthly reality..

The eunuch's problem is not just that he doesn't fully understand the prophecy, but that his life is disconnected from it.

How is the Servant in Isaiah going to affect his life in Ethiopia? How is the Spirit going to convince us into courage and confidence and joy (2 Timothy 1) if the message seems distant and irrelevant?

Our tension between "what ought to be" and "what is" is a reflection of our own search for the meaning of Easter in our daily life.

Troubled spouses, low or empty bank accounts, crying babies, boring routines—we wonder whether Easter ought to do something to change "real life."

A risen Savior, an incorruptible body, angels at the tomb, and disciples full of change—these are all evidence of victory, but we have no physical experience "here and now."

You may have your own "yes, but" when it comes to the Easter message. The brave proclamation of Christ on Sunday morning meets the reality of Monday morning, and you may find that you need something more than abstract reassurance. Something needs to change!

The Gospel brings about a change in the Ethiopian—and in us. The Gospel is so much more than mans empty words of philosophy and good intentions.

Philip shares the Gospel, and the Ethiopian is a second-class citizen no more. God in Christ Jesus has broken into his life and has swept away his sin and every other barrier to peace and assurance.

The eunuch's Baptism brings him union with Christ (Romans 6). His situation may not have changed—his work still lies before him, and he still bears the scars of his position—but *he* is changed by the blessing and presence of God. The tension of his life is still present, but it is the tension of his heart, which is resolved by the personal and powerful promises of God in Word and Sacrament.

You are changed in your Baptism too. Like the Ethiopian, you find that a lot of things in your life that does not change either.

But your heart is touched by the risen Christ. Perhaps your ears are tuned to the world and all of its noise and distractions but whether you notice it or not, your baptism makes you new. Jesus daily surrounds you with His grace.

His resurrection *is* personal! Today, and then again tomorrow, even though tomorrow is a Monday, and again and again, the day after, and the day after that.

God reaffirms His commitment to you, so that you can face the day as His beloved child, even when we don't act like His children, it doesn't change the fact that we are. We may fail but God always upholds His covenant that was made with you in your baptism.

You are, after all, what God says you are. Jesus is your Good Shepherd and you are His sheep. He is the Vine and we are the branches, not forgotten but nourished by the Vine. We are His children in baptism and He has promised to never leave us nor forsake us, and no one can snatch us out of the palm of His hand.

That is why you can find joy in your heart. Not because we sing the songs of victory; not because it is that time of year again; not because you are supposed to be joyful; but because you are different now.

You have been touched by the Lord, who guarantees that your life in the midst of this world will not be a waste.

Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding keep our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Amen.

S.D.G.—Soli Deo Gloria

Sermon Outline

Joyful—Sort of, I Guess

Acts 8:26–40

- I. The Ethiopian is caught in the tension between “what ought to be” and “what is.”
- II. We have tension between “what ought to be” and “what is”.
- III. The Gospel brings a change in the Ethiopian—and in us.