

Tommorow's church today

Acts 8:4-8 Philip in Samaria

⁴ Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went.⁵ Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. ⁶ When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. ⁷ For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. ⁸ So there was great joy in that city.

Acts 8:26-40 Philip and the Ethiopian

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked.

³¹ "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

³² This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

*"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*

³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth."^[b]

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

³⁶ As they travelled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" ^[37] ^[c] ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and travelled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

Have you ever gone on an overseas tour, or signed up to a group then on day one had a look around... What have I got myself into? And realised you are the odd one out?

We have done a few trips overseas on tours and we were never the odd ones out, because we were young Aus couple and there are heaps of young Aus couples travelling OS.

But one trip first day we looked around all young backpacker types and one single older lady, having a late change of life and I thought, this could be a long trip for her.

Ever had that, walked into the first day of class and thought... hmmm ... I'm defiantly the odd one out here, this is going to be interesting, Well this part of the Bible in Acts, at the very start of the church's mission to spread the gospel... it sounds like the set up to a bad joke, 3 guys walk into bar... a sorcerer, a eunuch and a murderer walk into a church. Three of the first conversion stories in Act are about 3 unlikely people – Simon the Sorcerer ch 8, Ethiopian Eunuch, and Saul the persecutor of the church. This is not what the Jewish Christians would have been expecting.

Let's focus on the Eunuch for a bit.

Philip is instructed by an angel to go south... not sure why he obeys. Then the spirit tells him to go near this chariot where he meets the Ethiopian Eunuch. He hears him reading Isaiah, because everyone read aloud in those days ☺. It's important that its Isaiah, the second most quoted OT book in the NT, after Psalms. And the most important OT book for understanding the Messiah.

Philip gets up on the carriage and starts to explain all about Jesus and Isaiah. So keen is the Eunuch he sees some water, a puddle? And wants to be baptised.

In Samaria Phillip would preach to the crowds, in a group setting. Sending the gospel out to all who would hear it. Here he take the time and the patience to explain the gospel through the Scriptures. This only happens because Philip is listening to the voice of God.

The angel tells him to go south (verse 26), the Spirit tells him to go to the chariot and wait (verse 29) – and Philip does, he listens to God's voice, and he is eager for opportunities to evangelise. He doesn't force his way into the conversation with a gospel presentation but he listens and waits for God to open the door.

Just before this Philip converts Simon the sorcerer (verses 9 and 13). A powerful man who was deeply involved in the dark arts. He is converted and tries to buy the anointing of the Spirit off the Apostles. So he still has a long way to go with understanding Christianity.

Then in chapter 9 the spirit converts Saul the persecutor of the church, murderer of Stephen (1st martyr). One of the most feared enemies of the church, part of the Jewish establishment, with the authority to kill anyone they deemed was a false prophet or blasphemies. Not a good guy, someone to be feared.

Now imagine that in the front row of church on a Sunday...

- Simon the sorcerer with his tarot cards in his pocket, dark arts;
- The Ethiopian Eunuch, a man that was clearly a gentile, who's has Gender identity issues due to some terrible pagan tradition or ritual, has been defiled and is ceremonially unclean, and could not be fixed.
- And then in chapter 9 Saul... a killer of Christians, part of the movement against the church. It would be like being a person of colour and seeing a KKK member sitting in the pew behind you.

This seems to be as bad as it gets for the Jewish Christians. Why are these people coming into the church? The Gospel was being spread into all the wrong places ... to all the wrong people. To the kind of people that would just make church hard and complicated. People that would turn others off, scare them away from coming at all.

And the Question is why, why are these 3 people highlighted as converts? Highlighted as people whom the spirit was deliberately and powerfully acting on that they might turn to Christ and call him Lord.

Because the Spirit is doing something – building tomorrow's church today. They were acting in a way that would scare off your average Jew, it would be a huge barrier for them, an obstacle for the current followers. Bringing in all the extreme fringes of society... the outsiders, dangerous people would be a stumbling block for other new converts from joining their ranks.

But this was not the act of human hands but an act of the Spirit.

Dragging these people into the church, in Saul's case kicking and screaming, is happening because the seed of the church of the future was being grown in the present. The church was not going to be another Israeli religion, not just a subset of Judaism but the Spirit was going to break it out into the entire Roman Empire – the whole known world .

Even though it was uncomfortable, even though it would have made many Christians nervous, the first century church leader pushed the church forward into the future by the guidance of the Spirit because they could see what the church would be, what it would look like – that it would be a church with 'no Jew, no Gentile, no slave no free, no man no woman' – all would be one in Christ Jesus. And the church would need Ethiopians, and sorcerers and persecutors to take the Gospel to places it had never been... to the end of the world.

Now more than ever in the history of the church, we need to be living out **Tomorrow's Church Today** because the decision we make today will shape the church of tomorrow. Tomorrow's church is being formed today, in the things we do, the priorities we make right here right now.

And like Philip did in those early days we have to be listening to the winds of the Spirit and recognise where they're blowing us.

This story of Philip is a story of someone listening to and following the Spirit's leading – even into unseemly places... to areas that will mean change and hardship for people

But these 3 people called here in Acts 8-9 are no accident, God calls them intentionally. He calls a Eunuch, not just any eunuch but the treasurer of the Queen's fortune – a man of importance, a man that has influence and the queen's ear. He was a man who travels and has the means to travel. Church tradition tells us that this man went into Ethiopia and spread the good news. The Ethiopian Orthodox church see this man (Simon Bachos) as their founder.

Simon the influential sorcerer who is known for his power, his abilities is recognised by the community as a man with spiritual sensitivity and powers. He bows down before the one true power, for everyone to see. His spiritual awareness lead him to recognise that Jesus is Lord and the whole pagan world – all those who practise the dark arts – would know this.

He calls Paul a high flyer in the Jewish scene. If Paul were alive today he would probably be a self-made man, entrepreneur with a PhD or something. He was the up and comer... he had been making a name for himself stamping out this Christian heresy from Judaism. Only problem is the gospel is real and needs to go to the whole world and Paul is going to be the man to take it there. As well as being educated,

driven... Paul is a roman citizen. He has access to travel throughout the whole Empire freely. How many Jews would have Roman Citizenship? Not many but this one did. The Spirit was at work building the future of the church in the actions of Philip. The actions of the spirit was seeding the church for centuries to come.

What was happening for the Christians at the time was **not about them** but it was about the kingdom. And here is the clincher for us, **our church is not about us** but it's about the kingdom.

It's not about the people in the pew around you, it's about the people **not** in the pews – the people that might one day sit there next to you.

The church has somewhere along the way forgot this lesson. They thought church was only for the insiders, for those that fit the mould of a good Christian but it's not. The church is the body of Christ doing his work and the work of the Gospel is to grow, to spread across people, across nations, across generations. The church is a future focused Entity, interested in tomorrow, not in today.

In 1968 if you asked which country would dominate the world watch market the answer would have been Switzerland because at the time they made 65% of the world's watches, with 90% the profit. By 1980 that had dropped to 10% of the world's watches. Why? Because in the late 70's early 80's the Swiss refused to produce the new thing – the Quartz watch, a new electronic design, no winding. The Swiss rejected it out right, it was too new, different, hard to shift. While the other watch manufactures jumped on the opportunity, they didn't. And just a few years later they lay off 50,000 watch makers in Switzerland.

The past was so strong in their minds that they were unwilling to accept the future. The success of the past was so strong in their minds that they could not consider future.

And our job is to be future focused, listen to where the winds of the spirit are blowing us.

Philip was blown to strange places, to strange people. By faith he went.

Where is the spirit leading us? Are we listening for the voice of the Spirit? Or just thinking about the past?

About 8 years ago the West Epping UC had this great youth worker. They started this great night service, one heart, multicultural, great music – a real revival from their traditional service in the morning. But it started to outgrow the space in West Epping. It wasn't central enough for the people, transport was tricky. They came to realise that this great thing that was happening in their congregation needed to move on to continue to grow. So they let it go, sent their leaders, their kids to another location while still financially partnering with this ministry.

What a difficult thing to suggest, can you imagine the meeting: "you know this great youth service we have, we have to let it go and keep paying for it". I bet that went down like a ton of bricks. But the Spirit was leading them seed the future of the church. At great personal sacrifice ... they listened.

This is what **the church** is called to do... this is **who we** are called to be.