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Easter V
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Text: Acts 8:26 – 40
Title: Road Trip

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. “Okay Philip,” Peter said, “Tell us what happened.”

Philip took a deep breath and tried to organize his thoughts one more time. The past few days were a whirlwind of memories. He had returned to Jerusalem with Peter and John after spreading the good news about Jesus to the Samaritans. There was so much to rejoice over at the end of that journey because so many of the Samaritans had been baptized and now believed in Jesus as the Messiah. But shortly after he returned to Jerusalem to be with the others an angel of the Lord appeared to him. “That’s really where it all started,” he realized as his thoughts began to organize themselves. “I definitely need to let them know that I was sent on this particular trip.”

So Philip took a deep breath to calm himself and then he began, “We had just returned from Samaria, and I was deep in prayer to the Lord. I wanted to give thanks to Him for using me to spread the Gospel of Jesus to the Samaritans. It was so overwhelming and gratifying to see them all believe in the Christ, and to even see that magician, Simon, humbled by the realization that the Spirit would not be subjected to his will or decisions.

“I remember that I had just praised the Lord for doing His work among us when I suddenly saw an angel of the Lord standing in the room with me! His robes were so white that they almost shined, and he said to me, ‘Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ You know, it never crossed my mind to do anything else. I got up and went in the direction that he told me to go. I couldn’t help but remember that first day I met Jesus, and He just said, ‘Follow me,’ and I got up and followed Him.” Everyone nodded as they remembered when they were first called to follow the Lord.

“When I got to the place that he told me about, I saw a great chariot coming towards me. It was drawn by some of the finest horses that I have ever seen, and it had the royal standard of a foreign country hanging from it. Something inside of me told me that I should meet whoever was inside, but I just didn’t want to speak with a Gentile. You understand what I mean, don’t you Peter? I just wasn’t sure if the Gospel should be shared with someone like that. They don’t typically belong with us.”

“I know exactly what you mean,” said Peter. “I’ve been wondering that myself. It’s one thing to share the good news of salvation with fellow Jews, and I can even bring myself to share it with Samaritans because they’re at least part Jewish. But does the Lord really want it to be shared with the Gentiles too?”

“That’s why I hesitated,” Philip continued. “I’m so used to avoiding Gentiles because I never wanted to be unclean, but then I heard another voice that I know I’ll never forget. It was the Holy Spirit speaking to me just like He did on Pentecost morning. He said, ‘Go over and join the chariot.’ After that voice commanded me, there was no more hesitation, but as I ran up to the chariot the Words of the Lord suddenly came back into my head from our last night together.

“We were sitting in that upper room celebrating the Passover with the Rabbi for the last time. Remember His final lessons to us that night? He told us so many things, but for some reason these words of His came back to me right after the Spirit’s voice spoke. Jesus said to us, ‘I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch

and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.’

“I know that the Rabbi went on from there, but for some reason those are the words that were so clear to me as I approached the chariot. He didn’t want us to sit back and do nothing, especially when an opportunity was given to us to share His Gospel with someone. If I learned anything from Jesus in the past three years, it was to always trust what He says, and to never doubt Him when He has a plan in mind because it’s going to happen one way or another. And if He wants to use me to do His work, then it’s a lot easier to let Him work through me than to try and counter Him every step of the way.

“All of this passed through my mind as I ran up to the chariot. I was just trying to figure out what I was going to say when I suddenly heard the person inside reading the words of the prophet, Isaiah. You would think that I would have been amazed to hear those familiar words coming from the mouth of a foreigner, but by this time I was well past anything surprising me. Once again, the Holy Spirit provided me with the opportunity to share the Good News about Jesus with someone. So I asked this foreigner, whose skin was as black as the night, ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’

“The man looked at me and said, ‘How can I, unless someone guides me?’ And then he invited me to join him in the chariot.

“As I said before,” Philip continued. “The chariot was very fine, and it turned out that the man riding in it was a eunuch from Ethiopia. He served in the court of Queen Candace herself as the official treasurer, and he had been visiting the temple in Jerusalem. As we talked, I asked him to show me where he had been reading, and he pointed to the prophet’s words which said, ‘Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his

mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.’ After I had read these Holy Words, the eunuch asked me, ‘About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?’

“I’m still amazed that I was able to say anything at all to this Ethiopian, but when I opened my mouth I was able to use those very same words from Isaiah to begin telling this man about the Gospel of Jesus. I described how Jesus was the silent lamb who was slaughtered, and how He had not said a word to avoid His death. I told him about how Judas betrayed Him, and how the chief priests denied Him justice and pressured Pilate to execute Him, just as the prophet said that they would. But I didn’t stop with these words in Isaiah. I made sure to tell the eunuch that Jesus did not stay dead in the tomb, but He rose again three days later. I told him that I had seen Him with my own eyes, and had touched Him with my own hands. Finally, I told this official that His sacrifice on the cross paid the price for the sins of the entire world, including his own, and that the last instructions from the Lord were to spread this good news and baptize those who were being taught and believed.

“It was at that moment that we passed a little creek near Gaza, and the Ethiopian official suddenly said to me, ‘See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?’ And he immediately stopped the chariot, and we both went down into the water. I baptized him then and there in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and as we were walking out of the creek and the eunuch was rejoicing over his new gift of faith, I was suddenly grabbed by the Spirit of the Lord and immediately found myself in Azotus. So, I decided to continue the work that I was originally sent into that area to do, and I preached the Gospel as I walked north to Caesarea.”

Peter and the others sat and stared at one another for a minute as Philip finished his story. There was no question in their minds that the Lord had once again added to the number of believers in Jesus the Christ. These branches had once again produced fruit, but they had never dreamed that

it would be given to an Ethiopian from the royal court that would carry the Gospel deeper into Africa than they had ever thought of going. None of them would have guessed that they should share the Gospel with someone like that.

But the Holy Spirit had led Philip to him. And now that the man had been baptized he was sure to spread the Good News to anyone that he came into contact with. Certainly he would tell the queen about it. Would she believe as well? Once again, they all realized, that when the Lord Jesus had said, "...to the ends of the earth." He very literally meant *the ends of the earth!* God alone knew how far that would take them before it was all over. For now, they had one more reason to celebrate the Lord's work in their midst, and to pray that He would continue to work to produce fruit through those who heard the Gospel that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God.

Today, we sit here as the branches that have been grafted into the vine of Jesus, and the Spirit is still working through each one of us to produce the fruit which comes from spreading the Gospel. There is no one around you that doesn't need to hear the Good News that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, died and rose from the dead for their sins. Even those of us who are already believers in Christ can never hear that enough. The Lord places countless opportunities right in front of you to share your faith, and He asks that you do so in order to produce fruit. But just as Jesus said we can do nothing apart from Him and just as the Holy Spirit gave Philip the instruction and opportunity of what to say, He'll do the same thing for you. He will work through His word and guide you in what to say to those around you who so desperately need to hear the Good News of the Gospel. That Jesus Christ was crucified on the cross to pay for your sins, and three days later He rose from the dead to forever defeat death for us. Because of that we truly can proclaim the Good News that Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.