

## Acts 8:26-40 “Don’t Fumble the Pass, Dad” 6/20/21 Fathers’ Day

On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a crude little lifesaving station - The building was no more than a hut, and there was only one boat; but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea

With no thought for themselves, they went out day and night, tirelessly searching for the lost - Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding area, wanted to be associated with the station and give their time, money, and effort to support the work - New boats were bought and new crews trained - The little lifesaving station grew

Some of these new members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped - They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as the first refuge of those who were saved from the sea

They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the newly enlarged building - Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place for its members, and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it because they used it as sort of a club

Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work - The lifesaving motif still prevailed in this club’s decorations, and there was a memorial lifeboat in the room where the club initiations were held

About this time, a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet, half-drowned people - They were dirty and sick, and some of them were foreigners

The beautiful new club was in chaos - Immediately, the property committee hired someone to rig up a shower house outside the club, where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club membership - Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities because they felt they were unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club

A small number of members insisted upon lifesaving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a lifesaving station - The small group's members were voted down and told that if they wanted to save lives, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast - So that is exactly what they did

As the years went by, however, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old station - It evolved into a club, and yet another lifesaving station was founded

History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit that seacoast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along that shore - Shipwrecks are still frequent in those waters, but the exclusive lifesaving clubs have nothing to do with them<sup>1</sup>

This illustration is from my "Hot Illustrations" book - And it is a parable of how the Church has weakened over the years

In the Sundays since Easter, we have been hearing a lot from the book of Acts - Our readings have described the beginnings of the Church - How the Apostles were faithful sharing the news of Jesus

The book of Acts describes a time when many believed and were saved - It was a time when God blessed the Church in amazing ways - And it grew by leaps and bounds

Today, I fear, many Churches have lost the original passion for sharing Jesus - They, like the Lifesaving Club, have lost their first passion - And they have grown comfortable, complacent, and exclusive

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<sup>1</sup> Hot Illustrations, © 2001, (Youth Specialties, El Cajon, CA)

Like the Lifesaving Club in the parable, many Churches today have beautiful facilities, wonderful people, and lots of activity - But lives are no longer saved - The Gospel is no longer the people's passion - And bringing people into a Saving relationship with Jesus Christ is no longer accomplished

A Church is not dead when the last service is held, the doors locked, and the building sold - A Church is dead long before that, when the people stop sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Now, you and I probably will not fix everything that is wrong with the Church in this 21st Century - Neither will we be able to stop our society's drift away from Christianity and the values we hold so precious

What we can do is to keep the passion alive - We can be sure that this Church continues to be a vital presence in this community where lives are changed by the transforming presence of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

We can continue to share the Gospel of Jesus - We can faithfully proclaim the message of Salvation - And in so doing, we will not only keep this Church from falling into the ranks of apostate backslidden Churches

But by being faithful to the mission that Jesus has called us to, making disciples, we will strengthen this community of faith and lead it into a stronger future

Today's passage in the book of Acts, of Philip and the Ethiopian, has a wealth of wisdom about sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ

Foremost, we should be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading - Notice how many times the passage mentions Philip being led by the Spirit of God - First, he is led to this road to Gaza by God - He sees the Ethiopian "And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> from Acts 8:29 - Scripture quoted has been taken from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version,  
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We too need God's guidance - And to do that we need to keep ourselves close enough to the Lord to be open to God's will in our lives

If we leave here today and God's voice booms down from Heaven to us we will have no problem hearing it - But God often speaks in a still small voice

We are not going to hear God speak in a gentle whisper unless we spend time listening for God - Our prayer time should not just be us praying - But it also needs to include time for us to listen

In addition, God may speak to us through His Word - But the only way we will hear God speak from the Scriptures is if we spend time reading our Bibles

God may also speak to us through other believers - That is only going to happen if we spend time with other believers - And that time should not just be spent talking about the Mets or Yankees game - But by devoting ourselves to the things that our Lord is passionate about

Another thing that leaps out of today's Acts passage is that the Gospel is for everyone - The Ethiopian Eunuch would not have been excepted by all of the Jews - He was not born a Jew - He was a different race - And being a Eunuch excluded him as well

Yet he had enough hunger for God to go to Jerusalem to worship - And to own a copy of the book of Isaiah - Something that was very expensive in that day

We too need to be careful not to judge anyone - Careful not to exclude anyone - But to have a willingness to share the Gospel with everyone - Even those who might make us uncomfortable

Witnessing is always more effective when God has prepared the way - Therefore, we should bathe those we want to share with in prayer - God will go before us and warm that person's heart - And they will be more open to what we have to share

Notice how Philip responded to the Ethiopian's questions - It is great to plan ahead, to have an idea of what Scriptures to use and what we want to say - But we also need to listen - To respond to the seeker's questions

It is also important that our sharing be based in the Scriptures - Hebrews 4:12 "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart"

This brings us another reason to be reading our Bibles - Because to witness from the Scriptures, we must know the Scriptures well enough to be able to share them

It is very important that the focus of our witness is Jesus - Jesus died so that we might be forgiven - We are only saved by trusting Christ to be our Savior - So our focus when sharing the Gospel must be Jesus

We should invite a response - Philip baptized the Ethiopian, but today Baptism is a Sacrament in our denomination and is reserved for our worship setting - But you might invite the person to be baptized here in our Church

Another way to invite a response, could be to have them pray a prayer asking Jesus to be their Savior - Or you might just invite the person to join you at Church for worship

Finally, we gather today on a holiday called Fathers' Day - And our Scriptures have much to say about the responsibilities of being a father - Ephesians 6:4 "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord."

Colossians 3:21 "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." - Despite all the Scriptural mandates, many fathers are weak in the faith, and do little to see that their children raised to be moral and righteous - A good dad can do much to pass on the faith in his family

In conclusion, I want you to realize that witnessing is one of the most important things we do - This Church has been an important presence in the communities we serve for many years

Yet, if we fail to share Jesus, the Church here is doomed - Without Jesus we will be little more than a social club with a beautiful antique building

On the other hand, if we are faithful witnesses, our Church is sure to resemble the one described in the book of Acts - I titled this message "Don't fumble the pass, Dad" with Fathers' Day in mind - Yet, passing along the faith is a responsibility that every believer shares

Acts 4:31 "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."

We too should be sharing the resurrection of our Lord Jesus with boldness - If we do, I can guarantee that God's grace will also be powerfully at work in this Church and in all of us who follow Jesus here