

## Worship at Home Guide



**July 12, 2020**

**15<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**

This Worship at Home Guide is a supplement to our worship services.

- 8:30 a.m. Zoom based worship service.
- 10:30 a.m. Drive-In Church in the church parking lot.
- 5:30 p.m. Outdoor worship around the fire pit. Lawn chairs suggested. Bring your own dinner.

Join Zoom Meeting (Click link below). You will be prompted to enter the username/password.

[Join our Cloud HD Video Meeting now](#)

Meeting ID: 840 5188 5876

Password: 903205

\* If there are technical difficulties, communication will come via email.

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**Gathering Question**

**Gathering Music**

**Opening Sentences**                      **Matthew 9:37-38**

The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

Lord, send us out into your harvest.

### **Prayer of the Day**

Teach us, good Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to toil and not seek for rest; to labor and not ask for any reward, save that of knowing we do your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **Hymn           “Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove”**

Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove, with all thy quickening powers;  
Kindle a flame of sacred love in these cold hearts of ours.

### **Prayer of Confession**

Almighty God, you poured out your Holy Spirit upon gathered disciples  
Creating bold tongues, open ears, and a new community of faith.  
We confess that we hold back the force of your Spirit among us.  
We do not always faithfully listen for your word of grace or speak your word of love.  
Have mercy on us as we lift our individual prayers to you...  
Have mercy on us. Transform our timid lives by the power of your Spirit,  
and fill us with a flaming desire to be your faithful people. Amen.

### **Hymn           “Spirit Of The Living God”**

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.  
Melt me; Mold me; Fill me; Use me;  
Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

### **Scripture/Meditation     Acts 8:26-40**

#### *Philip and the Ethiopian*

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. 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 silent before its shearer,  
so he does not open his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?  
For his life is taken away from the earth.”

The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.

As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When he came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

### **Questions for Reflection and Discernment**

1. What questions do you have for Luke as the storyteller?
2. For Philip as the one who lives the story?
3. What word or phrase catches your eye/ear in this story?
4. What do you make of this story? What seems plausible? What is challenging?
5. What do you remember about this story when it was told to you in Sunday School?
6. Once again, Philip was introduced as one who would "wait on tables." What do you think moved him leading to this experience and the story we have?

### **Anthem**

#### **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Lord, hear;  
Lord, forgive;  
Lord, do.  
Hear what we speak not;  
Forgive what we speak amiss;  
Do what we leave undone;  
That not according to our words or our deeds,  
But according to your mercy and truth,  
All may work for your glory,  
And the good of your kingdom,  
Hear now our individual and collective prayers of thanksgiving and intercession:

Mighty God, whose Word we trust, whose Spirit equips us to pray, we pray saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

**Hymn           “Come, Holy Spirit, Heavenly Dove”**

Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove, with all thy quickening powers;  
Come shed abroad a Savior’s love, and that shall kindle ours.

**Sharing of the Peace: Sharing Jesus’ invitation to his disciples:**

Peace be with you.

As the Father has sent me, so I send you!

Resources from the *Book of Common Worship and Glory to God Hymnal, PCUSA*

**Interpretation of Acts 8:26-40, The Unhindered Gospel**

In this story it is an “angel of the Lord” whom we meet first, ordering Philip around, ordering him to do an absurd thing—travel down a deserted road at noon! This is not the first nor will it be the last time in Acts that someone will hear a seemingly absurd order from the Lord (Acts 5:20; 9:11-12; 10:9-16). Only the angel talks. Philip says nothing. Philip is compliant, obedient, taking no initiative on his own. On this deserted road Philip meets an Ethiopian. Philip responds to the Ethiopian’s questions about what he is reading, then the Spirit seizes him and takes him to Azotus. So who is the real protagonist of this story? The eunuch Philip encounters on the desert road from Jerusalem to Gaza is described in considerable detail. He need not be a castrated male who was excluded from the temple (Deuteronomy 24.1). Rather, we are reading a story about an important man, a foreigner, though possibly a Jew, a powerful person who has much power and authority as the queen’s minister—except the power to understand the word of God. Yet he is willing to be instructed by Philip in “the good news of Jesus” (8:35).

Luke’s audience would be fascinated with this Ethiopian. In the Greco-Roman world the term “Ethiopian” was often applied to black people. Here is a person from an exotic land, the edge of the world, someone whose dark skin made him an object of wonder and admiration. This warns us not to consider the Ethiopian as a despised or deprived person—quite the opposite. He is a powerful, though exotic, court official, a well-placed and significant person who is receptive to the truth. He beseeches Philip to interpret for him and then to baptize him. Here is an earnest inquirer who reaches out and is graciously included into the actions of God.

He is converted and asks what hinders him from baptism. Luke places this baptism at a strategic position in his narrative. The baptism of the Ethiopian official is situated between the baptism of Samaritans and, in chapter 10, the baptism of a gentile. Furthermore, Luke’s excessive use of divine prodding and interventions in this story—an angel giving directions, the Spirit commanding the presence of water, the Spirit carrying Philip away—are paralleled in only one other story: the story of Cornelius. The mission to the gentiles depicted in the baptism of Cornelius, the presence of the gospel out here in the desert of Gaza with this Ethiopian of somewhat murky physical, religious, and ethnic status can only be attributed to the constant

prodding of the Spirit. If the good news is being preached out there, it is the work of God, not of people. In being obedient to the Spirit, preachers like Philip find themselves in the oddest of situations with the most surprising sorts of people.

from *Acts, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, William H. Willimon

### **Meditation on Acts 8:26-40**

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! Blessings in God's name on this sixth Sunday after Pentecost, or the 15th Sunday in Ordinary Time. We have entered the most extended time in the church year, the time referred to as Ordinary Time, so named not because it is a time of low expectations but because it is a time that does not have a holiday, like Christmas or Easter, or the context of a specifically devoted season, such as Advent or Lent. It is a season of growth and the liturgical color is green. This year as we grow into the new ordinary brought on by Covid-19 and the societal unrest in our land, we are focusing on stories from the Acts of the Apostles, overhearing how the early Church found her voice witnessing to what God was doing in Jesus' name through the Spirit.

Now we hear of Philip. There are two stories told about him. One earlier in Acts 8 in which he is found proclaiming the Word of God in Samaria, a sign that the disciples are willing to confront ancient biases and prejudices within themselves and society in order to witness to what God has done in the person of Jesus through the passion and purpose of the Holy Spirit. The enmity between Jews and Samaritans is reflected several places in scripture, and while the history of this enmity is a bit cloudy, it is thought that Jews and Samaritans are cousins, both legally and religiously, and they worship the same God. The latter were descendants of Jews who had intermarried with foreigners during a time of Jews being sent off into exile (probably Babylonia), and who were living in the land when the descendants of those who had been displaced returned to their ancestral homes. Jesus is quoted as telling his disciples not to enter their land. And, we have the familiar—and favorite—stories of “The Good Samaritan” and “The Samaritan Woman at the Well”, the former from Luke and the latter from John's gospel. At the end of Matthew, the so called “great commission” has the risen Lord instructing the disciples to go out into “all the world”, and Philip understands that this includes Samaria.

Philip, as he manifests many signs including exorcisms and healing of lame persons, attracts, among others, a magician named Simon who is amazed as he witnessed the signs and miracles that were taking place. Word gets back to the apostles in Jerusalem, and Peter and John are sent to investigate. They prayed and laid hands on the people and the gift of the Holy Spirit was bestowed on those gathered. Simon is so impressed with the gift of the Holy Spirit that he offers the apostles money so that, having purchased, the ability, he can include it in own work as a magician. From the Biblical witness, magicians were often persons the disciples encountered as they witnessed to the Word. Peter takes the opportunity to preach repentance to Simon, inviting him to return to God in a way that honors God. Simon hears what Peter has to say and responds

by asking Peter to pray for him. We are told that Peter and John returned to Jerusalem after further witnessing.

Meanwhile, “an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ (This is a wilderness road.)” He got up and went.

He encounters (or is he encountered by) another foreigner, a theme in this chapter that will now expand as we work our way deeper into the witness of Acts. We learn much of this man: he’s an Ethiopian, we’re told he’s a eunuch and he’s an important man—he’s in charge of the entire treasury for the Queen of Ethiopia, and that he’s been to Jerusalem to worship, meaning that he is a person who is attracted to the law, prophets, and writings of the Jews. In fact, he’s still engaged in religious education, as we’re told that Philip finds him in his chariot reading from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 53:7-8 is what is quoted in Acts 32-33, and is part of one of the “Suffering Servant” passages identified by scholars).

The Spirit directs Philip to “Go over to his chariot and join it.” Hearing him reading out loud, he engages the Ethiopian and is invited to sit beside him in the chariot and guide him in his learning. We also learn that the Ethiopian asks good questions. “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Philip accepts the invitation to witness to “the good news about Jesus.”

What a marvelous story in which strangers come together, listen to each other, and inspired by the Spirit, embody further what God has done in Jesus through the passion and purpose of the Holy Spirit. Having heard about baptism, the Ethiopian, noting water along the road, asks “What is there to prevent me from being baptized?” After commanding the chariot’s driver to stop (he is a powerful person!), Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and the eunuch is baptized. As they came up out of the water, “the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away.” The eunuch went on his way rejoicing, never to see Philip again. Philip next lands (hopefully on his feet!) in Azotus, and he proclaims “the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea” which was on the Mediterranean Sea coast. Yes, the Spirit directs!

Over the past month our nation has been roiled by demonstrations both peaceful and problematic as persons have protested discrimination in many forms. For those who have experienced the discrimination during their lifetime, the demonstrations have been met with both wonder and worry. Grateful for new voices joining in the chorus of old complaints, they wonder about the staying power of the new advocates.

Racism, one aspect of discrimination, is an institutional sin—perhaps the institutional sin—in this country, and it has been perpetuated in part by an unwillingness to listen to those who have borne the burdens of racism: persons of color. What if Philip would have not been willing to listen

to the Spirit's invitation (direction?) to listen to the Ethiopian? What if he had allowed the obvious skin color difference to be the reason not to engage, and you don't think he had that option as a person first, as a child of God first and foremost? Philip listened to the Spirit, accepting the opportunity to listen first, as a form of witness. And the story made the book—the Bible—as one of the limited number of stories collected to share what God is doing in the world.

God invites us to do what Philip did: listen to the Spirit, and then listen to the ones whom God invites us to engage (or be engaged by). This story serves as a witness to the opportunities that are possible because of what and how God invites us to witness as disciples of Jesus supported by the Spirit. Amen.