

Adult Teaching Resources

April 28, 2024



Season of Easter

April 7, 2024—"True Community"—Acts 4:32-35

April 14, 2024—"Why the Surprise?"—Acts 3 (RCL 3:12-19)

April 21, 2024—"This Is the Way"—Acts 4:1-12 (RCL 4:5-12)

April 28, 2024—"What Hinders Me?"—Acts 8:26-40

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What Hinders Me?

Acts 8:26-40

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Key Verse

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?” (Acts 8:36)

Opening

After everyone arrives, form small groups of 3-4. Once each group is settled, ask each group to consider the opening question from our Lesson Writer:

“What do we do with the resurrection story?”

That was an important question for the early disciples and continues to be a significant question for us today. What do we do with the resurrection story?

Give each group time to wrestle with their thoughts and responses to the question, then open the floor for large group conversation and discussion before moving to the Bible.

Reading the Bible

What did the angel of the Lord say to Philip? (Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.)

What did Philip do? (he got up and went)

Who was in charge of the Ethiopian queen’s entire treasury? (an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians)

Why had the eunuch come to Jerusalem? (to worship)

What was he doing as he returned home on his chariot? (he was reading the prophet Isaiah)

What did the Spirit say to Philip? (Go over to this chariot and join it)

What did Philip ask when he got to the chariot? (Do you understand what you are reading?)

How did the eunuch reply? (How can I, unless someone guides me?)

What was the passage of scripture? (“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a

Reading the Bible *continued*

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.)

What did the eunuch ask Philip about the passage? (About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?)

How did Philip respond? (starting with this scripture he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus)

What happened when they came upon some water? (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)

What happened when they came out of the water? (the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing)

Where was Philip? (He 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)

Making Connections

Have you ever had an experience with what you would call an “angel?” What are you willing to share about that experience? If not, what do you believe about the presence of angels in others’ lives?

When have you felt God’s call to do something and you weren’t exactly sure what your mission was? How did God call you? What did you think God wanted you to do? When everything was done, what did God want you to do?

Who has God “sent” you to listen and talk to? What were you able to say? What impact did your words have on that person?

What story or section of the Bible do you have trouble understanding? What is it about that section that gives you trouble?

When you have trouble understanding something in scripture, where/who do you turn to help with answers? What about that source do you trust?

Share the story of your baptism. When and where were you baptized? What do you remember about the event? How did you feel during the event? How did you feel after the event?

Our Lesson Writer explains, “Once the evangelist had accomplished his purpose, Luke wrote, ‘the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away,’” How do you know the mission God called you to do is complete and it’s time for the next mission?

So What?

Ask everyone to gather back together in their small groups from the beginning of class. Once each group is settled, share these four patterns of behavior our Lesson Writer observes about Philip.

So What? *continued*

1. Philip was a faithful follower of Jesus
2. Philip listened for God, and paid attention when God spoke.
3. Philip obeyed God, even when it was not convenient.
4. Philip responded without prejudice.

Have each person share with quality they feel they have a good grasp on in their life; and the quality they feel they need to work on the most in their life.

Then, ask each group to create a modern-day description of someone who embodies all four of those qualities.

What does a “modern-day” Philip look like?

How does he come across as faithful, but not overly religious?

Who do you know that embodies all four of these qualities?

Give each group time to talk amongst themselves, then open the floor for large group conversation and discussion.

Finally, ask the question posed by our Lesson Writer, “What hinders us from reaching out to all people, including those who are different?”

The Challenge

This week, work on the weakest quality you named from the “So What?” Section. What can you do to become stronger in that area? Do it!

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for your call to serve you and serve others. Thank you for Philip and his ministry as a model for how we are to serve. Help us to use the gifts you have given us and help us to work on the qualities that need work. May we serve you without prejudice. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Ethiopia and its queen—In the Hebrew Bible, the area here called Ethiopia was usually called “*Cush*.” The Egyptians spelled it “*Kush*,” and the early Greek translation rendered it *Aithiopia*. The area referred to was between the first and sixth cataracts of the Nile, comprising part of what is now southern Egypt and the Sudan. Modern Ethiopia is further to the south. The entire area south of Egypt was also known as “Nubia.”

Though most translations speak of “Candace, queen of Ethiopia,” the word “Candace,” like “Pharaoh,” may have been a title rather than a personal name.

Acceptance—Although the Ethiopian official worshiped the God of the Jews, he could not have become a Jew. First century Hebrews had rituals designed to incorporate proselytes from among the Gentiles, but Deut. 23:1 ruled that “No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD” (NRSV).

It was common in the ancient world for male officials who served in high places to be castrated as a sign of their loyalty, and as added assurance that the women of the court would be safe around them. That job requirement was rejected by the Jews, and would hardly hold up in today’s world, but was an accepted part of life in antiquity.

Requirements for baptism?—The transmission of this text has an history. In the oldest and best manuscripts of the New Testament that we have from long before the text was divided into chapters or verses—Philip offers no response to the man’s question: “What is there to prevent me from being baptized?” (v. 36). The account goes immediately what became v. 38, where Philip ordered the chariot to stop by a pool of water, and baptized him.

Thus, the implicit answer to the man’s question is “nothing.” Nothing prevented him from being baptized, and Philip felt no need to comment.

As time passed, however, there must have been some in the church who were not comfortable with this unanswered question, or with its implication. So, in later Greek manuscripts representative of what we now call the “Western tradition”—the one used most prominently in the King James Version of the Bible, the text was expanded. What we now have as v. 37 echoes an early credo that may have been part of a first century baptismal formula: “*And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God*” (v. 37, KJV). The NRSV, NET2, NIV11, ESV, and NASB20 all omit the verse in the text, relegating it to a footnote.

If there were people who still dared add to the received text of the Bible today, they might expand Philip’s answer even more. They might insist that the eunuch visualize all his sins and speak particular words of repentance, or that he must first have a greater understanding

Digging Deeper *continued*

of doctrine, or that he must “walk the aisle” and make a public profession of faith in an established church before he could be baptized.

We can be glad that God’s grace is bigger than that: glad that God takes us where we are, loves us where we are, and saves us where we are when we trust divine grace. When the eunuch understood what Christ had done for him and wanted to do for him, there was still much he did not understand, but he understood enough to seek Christ’s presence. For Philip, that was enough to warrant an immediate baptism.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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What hinders us?

The hardest question related to this story does not derive from the text itself, but from our refusal to learn from it. How many of us can claim to be without prejudice when it comes to welcoming others into our churches?

In America, Sunday morning remains the most racially divided time of the week. I have known both youth ministers and pastors who have been forced from their positions because they encouraged Black friends to participate in the church programs.

Such behavior does more than hurt the minority youth or children whose faith could be damaged by such attitudes. It can also disillusion or derail ministers from their calling, it prevents the prejudiced from experiencing the fullness of Christ, and it harms the witness of the church.

In many congregations, similar exclusions apply to persons who are gay, lesbian, or transgendered—not entirely unlike the eunuch, whose gender had been surgically altered and whose appearance would have distinguished him from other males.

The text demands that we ask ourselves if we are willing to reach out to anyone, of any ethnicity or gender expression, without regard for whether we think they deserve it or whether their presence makes us uncomfortable in some way.

Are we willing to share the good news of grace that knows no limits?

We claim to serve a God who seeks people who love God supremely and who love each other as Christ loves them. For us to be faithful followers, that must also be our passion.

Such living is not a duty to be met, but an outgrowth of who we are as sinners saved by grace, willing to use our gifts for the glory of God and the good of humankind. We are called to live and speak in such a way that when others read the pages of our lives, they will understand what God's greatness and graciousness are all about.