

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 8: 26-end; 1 John 4: 7-end ; John 15: 1-8

Sermon – Abiding and Telling

Memory

So I wonder if you remember your own baptism? I would guess that for the majority of us, probably not, because we were infants. But for those who were baptized as adults, and even those who were confirmed, we will probably have those memories.

However, you may well remember the first person or people who told you something about Jesus? Perhaps for the majority of us, there was no one single dramatic, moment when somebody took us aside and told us all about him which helped us to come to faith in an instant. But maybe there was?

Philip

The Acts reading today is a testament from someone who remembers both, the person who helped them to faith, and their baptism! What a moment this was, not just for him, but for the whole Gospel message of Jesus, and the Church that was being built on its foundation.

If you heard or read my sermon from a couple of weeks ago, you will have heard me talk about how Acts is the story of how the Church was being built on the foundation of the Resurrection. The first witnesses were spreading the word and people were coming to faith literally in their thousands.

So this meant that there had to be a recruitment drive; the apostles had decided that in order for them to continue their own ministry of prayer and preaching, there needed to be some pruning to their other duties. They couldn't do it all. None of us can.

So they employed some men who were “full of the spirit and wisdom”, in order to carry out the pastoral care that the apostles no longer were able to do properly. In this case it was ensuring the poorest were properly fed and looked after. These new men were called deacons, and the Philip of our story today was one of those deacons.

But just after this had happened, the Church started to suffer persecution; isn't it often the case that as soon as something good gets going, along come the forces of opposition and resistance. One of the deacons, Stephen, was murdered and Philip it seemed was sent away – but not to hide but to further spread the word.

So when God gave Philip an opportunity to spread that word to this Ethiopian Eunuch, he did so with great enthusiasm. The Eunuch clearly was curious about the Jewish faith and had many questions but only a little understanding; Philip was sent by God to answer them as best he could and then to follow up which in this case meant baptising the eunuch.

I imagine Philip bursting with excitement to witness to the good news about the resurrection of Jesus, so much so that he *simply got up and went* when he felt the calling to and *ran up* to the chariot barely able to contain himself as he spoke with the Eunuch.

According to one early church theologian the Eunuch's telling of his baptism and coming to faith were the basis of his preaching of the resurrection in Ethiopia, laying the ground for the Church to be built there.

Our 'Philips'

However we came to faith, there must have been certain key people who were of particular importance when it came to our understanding of God, and who helped, guided and inspired us in those first few and important steps of faith.

I wonder who it was for you and what it was they did or said, which inspired you – not only to be a good person, but to *want to learn more about Jesus*. Perhaps it was someone who, when you were with them, you felt something of a divine presence was close by; or felt like anything was possible; or that life seemed to make sense; or felt a strong sense of peace?

Perhaps this is how our Eunuch felt when he was in the company of Philip, someone full of spirit and wisdom, someone who was clearly abiding in Christ and in whom Christ was abiding.

Abiding in Christ

Philip was able to help this Eunuch to transform his life because he, Philip, was clearly abiding in Jesus in the way Jesus encouraged his disciples to abide in him, as we read in John's gospel.

The resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost enabled Jesus to continue to do his work of directing, speaking, and performing deeds of power through those who had decided they would abide in him and allow him to abide in them. But now he could do it anywhere and everywhere that his followers went or were sent to.

Sometimes we find ourselves with opportunities to speak about our faith, has it occurred to you that God's Holy Spirit is doing with you what it did with Philip, and placing you in a particular place *deliberately* to do just that: to tell someone about our faith in God? I wonder how many opportunities I have missed over the years to be that person who makes the difference in the life of another, just like that person who made such a difference in my own and our lives.

To allow Jesus to abide in us means that we create room in our lives, hearts and minds for him to work in and through us. And there are many ways to do this. As the Bishop of Birmingham said in his first sermon, we do this through our prayers, our Bible

reading, worshipping with others, serving others *and **being people who are prepared to speak of him to others!***

And to do this, we often have to be prepared to let some things go, so that there is room for him. There so much that can clutter up our lives and the lives of our Churches that leave little or no room for him. Are there any branches in our lives and in our churches that need pruning in order to let Christ bear more fruit in our lives, our churches, and therefore in the lives of others?

Go and tell

So today, as we think of Philip, can we firstly give thanks to God for that person or people who helped us in our faith.

Also, can we commit to sharing the Gospel with others?

Now I am not suggesting that you go running after the number 6 bus, and then start baptizing people in the nearest puddle. We don't even have to give them a Bible study, but maybe we can give them an invitation:

an invite to the café, an invite to the Creative Prayer Day, an invite to pray for them, or even invite them to join us in Church for a service?

Following the example of Philip, and in gratitude to those who were Philip to us, let's allow the abiding Christ to inspire us to tell others of the good news of the resurrection of Jesus. Amen

Rev'd Richard Haynes 5th Sunday of Easter 2024