

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter, May 3, 2015

**Talk to Them!**

Dr. Kenneth Humphreys

May 3, 2015

Acts 8:26-39

Our scripture reading this morning from Acts is one of the more unusual stories in scripture, a tale of an outcast being converted to Christianity. The story is very precise in its detail. An angel talks to Philip, tells him exactly where to go, and he meets up with a eunuch who is reading the book of Isaiah. The eunuch was a minister to the queen of Ethiopia, the Kandake (Candace). Kandake by the way was not the name of the queen; it was her title, much like the kings of Egypt being called Pharaoh.

The eunuch had been to Jerusalem to worship but was prohibited from becoming a Jew because he was castrated. Deuteronomy 23:1 prohibited him from doing so. It reads, *“No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the LORD.”*

Here was a man seeking the Lord but rejected under Jewish law. He was obviously a learned man and was clearly wealthy as evidenced by the facts that he had a chariot and a copy of Isaiah. He had faith, he had the desire to seek God, and he was arbitrarily excluded because of a perception that somehow or other he didn't belong.

Philip came and talked to him. He told him about Jesus and the eunuch jumped at the opportunity to accept Christ, asking to be baptized. Would that evangelism be that easy, **and it is** if only we make a greater sincere effort to talk to those who are yearning for God and who, for one reason or another, are excluded or marginalized, if only in their minds.

A eunuch was stigmatized in ancient societies and was socially ostracized. Josephus wrote, *“Let those that have made themselves eunuchs be had in detestation: and do you avoid any conversation with them ... let such be driven away ...”*

On the other hand, Isaiah 56:4-5 says, *“For this is what the LORD says: ‘To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant— to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure*

*forever”* and Isaiah 56:7b reads, *“Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.”*

These scriptures from Isaiah are likely why the eunuch had a copy of Isaiah. They held out hope for him whereas the Torah, Deuteronomy, did not. This is just one of many inconsistencies in scripture, inconsistencies which have often been used to exclude entire groups of people from participation in the work of God.

Consider, for example, how the Samaritans were excluded by the Jews. Consider how in our own denomination for a long time women were excluded from holding offices in the church, from being elders, and from being pastors. Consider the fact that for hundreds of years blacks were enslaved and excluded from white society. Even after emancipation they were excluded from most churches, a situation which still exists de facto today.

The same situation is true with immigration in this country, at one time with the Irish, but now with the Hispanics. Rarely do you see a Hispanic or an African American in most Presbyterian churches. Sure, we do have African American and Hispanic congregations but that is still de facto segregation.

Philip responded to the needs of the eunuch and brought him to the faith. He talked to the eunuch, a person truly seeking God.

Our community has thousands of poor and marginalized, thousands of minorities, and thousands of those who hunger for God. They will continue to hunger unless someone talks to them, talks to them about Jesus, and invites them to accept Christ as their Lord and Savior.

The eunuch had such a hunger and Philip talked to him. Won't you seek out those who are spiritually hungry and talk to them? They need it and we need it as well.

In a few moments we will celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

The invitation to the Lord's Table often begins, "Friends, this is the joyful feast of the people of God! They will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God." This invitation is for everyone, black or white, male or female, young or old, lifelong resident or immigrant --- **everyone!**

The problem is that not everyone knows this. They need to be invited. **Talk to them.**

David Roper in his April 21, 2013 devotional in Our Daily Bread said:

*“God saves us one by one. If you have access to one, that is your mission field. ‘Every soul with Christ is a missionary; every soul without Christ is a mission field.’ ... One person cannot reach the entire world, but we can love our neighbor. ‘Who is our neighbor?’ we ask. The next person we meet along the way.*

*“The Spirit brought Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading the Scriptures and needed someone to explain them to him. The Spirit gave Philip the right words to say, and the eunuch confessed his faith in Christ.*

*“Ask God to bring you to the one He has prepared. He’ll get you to the right place at the right time to speak to that individual. He will speak through your lips, work through your hands, and fulfill in you the great purpose of his will.”*

But this won’t happen unless you, each and every one of you, seeks out those individuals who are longing to find God and Christ. Seek them out and **talk to them!**

**Amen.**

(Note: All scriptural quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible)