



Poland Presbyterian Church

At the Green since 1802

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Poland, Ohio 44514
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May 3, 2015

Fifth Sunday of Easter

Acts 8:26-40

The Rev. Robbin Del Nagro

“Taxicab Testimonies”

As a Presbyterian are you familiar with what our Book of Order defines as “The Great Ends of the Church?” I find that knowing just what the church is here for is enlightening and helpful. And on this day when we have or will elect new officers of the church, elders and deacons, we should be reminded of the Great Ends of the Church once again. There are six listed:

- the proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind
- the shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God
- the maintenance of divine worship
- the preservation of the truth
- the promotion of social righteousness and
- the exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.

I am only going to talk about the first of that list of great ends – one of the reasons the church exists – to proclaim the gospel for the salvation of humankind. You notice that this does not pertain just to teaching elders – preachers like Brent and I, or even to ruling elders or deacons, but to all of us.

I cannot tell you how many times people have said to me, “I just don't know how to share the gospel with others.” We are people of great faith and Christian commitment, but we all seem to have a difficult time sharing our faith with others. It fills us with fear. Nobody wants their friends to turn and go the other way when they see them coming, knowing that they will be trying to “convert” them. That's not what I'm talking about. But sometimes we don't even make the attempt to share with others the good news of the gospel that we have received and that we know to be true. I imagine that it was just as difficult a task for those first century disciples, now called apostles, to share the good news of the gospel that they had received. But without their boldness we would not have a church today.

We don't know very much about Phillip, featured in our story from Acts, but we do know that he shared his faith in this story in a somewhat different way. It began by listening for the call of the Holy Spirit who came to him through an

angel of the Lord and gave him specific instructions. Phillip didn't ask a lot of questions or make a lot of excuses. No, he got up at once and followed the angel's command. It might seem like this was just an ordinary occurrence but have you ever had a Holy Spirit moment? They don't come every day but when they do you know it is the Holy Spirit and you remember the details.

One day maybe twenty years ago now I was driving from Baltimore, Md to Wilmington, De on Interstate 95. I stopped for gas and just as I was about to leave I saw an old brown car pull up to the pump. It was dusty and had Alabama plates on it. A woman climbed out of the car, followed by more children than I knew a car like that could hold. My heart was touched with both pity and gratitude that I was not that woman. Then I left the gas station and drove across the street to the Burger King drive through. As I got to the window to order I looked into my wallet and saw two one dollar bills and two ten dollar bills. Then the Holy Spirit or the angel of the Lord, or the voice of God said to me, "Get the two dollar cheeseburger, keep \$10 and give \$10 to that woman." I'm not sure if it was audible or not but I said, "What did you say?" "Get the \$2 cheeseburger, keep \$10 and give \$10 to that woman." I ordered the cheeseburger and then, with my hands trembling, before I could think about it, as fast as I could, I drove back to the gas station, hoping the brown car was still there. I pulled in just in front of the woman pulling out and blocked her way. I jumped out of my car and through her open window dropped the \$10 bill, saying, here, this is for you. I jumped back into my car and got back on the Interstate. Only a few minutes later the brown car was in the lane next to me with all of those little hands waving furiously. The tolls between Baltimore and Wilmington turned out to be \$10 – I had enough and so did the woman in the brown car. That was a Holy Spirit moment.

So now, if you can imagine, Phillip is told to go to a wilderness road, find a particular chariot, run along beside it and get in and share the gospel with the fellow inside. The man inside the chariot taxicab served in a high position, responsible for the entire treasury of Ethiopia. He was reading Hebrew scripture and he was returning from worship in Jerusalem so we might assume that he was a Jew. He was educated and well to do, but he was also outside of the mainline religious establishment. He could go to Jerusalem to worship but nobody was going to teach him the meaning of the scriptures, specifically this passage from Isaiah that he was studying.

There are people in our world today who read the Bible, but don't feel particularly welcome at a local church Bible study class. There are people in our world today who go to worship but don't know what the scriptures really mean. There are people in our world today who are financially well off, who have positions of responsibility and power, but have never heard the good news of the

gospel in a way that was understandable to them.

So here comes Phillip, if you can imagine, running down the road to say, Bismarck, North Dakota, or some equally out of the way place, running down the only limosine on the highway, the one carrying the state treasurer on his way back from Washington. The cab stops and the back door opens. And Phillip climbs right in. Not only is the gentleman inside not surprised to see him, but he is openly hospitable. He is reading his Bible as he rides but he doesn't understand a word and he is humble enough to admit it.

We don't know exactly what Phillip shared with this man, but we know it was the good news of the gospel – it was the gospel that Phillip had received. Perhaps what the gentleman needed most to hear was the word that Phillip spoke, that he was included. For this man was a eunich and he was not included but marginalized by his religious peers. When they found a place of water they stopped and in a ritual of inclusion he was baptised and that day he became a part of the community of believers, the church, the body of Christ. That day he was included. We don't know if the good news Phillip shared was that Jesus loved him, or that Jesus freed him, or that Jesus saved him. We don't know if Phillip told him that Jesus had compassion on those who were outside looking in and that no matter why he was on the outside before, he was on the inside now. We don't know if Phillip told him that Jesus guides us to God, strengthens us through the Holy Spirit, and comforts us in our distress, but whatever words the Holy Spirit gave him, Phillip shared.

What is the good news of the gospel that you have received? Is it that Jesus molds us into a beloved community, or that Jesus gives us a beautiful vision of a brave new world where people love each other, or that in Jesus's presence you are at peace? What you have received, you are called to share, because you cannot share a gospel that you have not experienced for yourself. You can only share the gospel that you have known in your heart to be true. It doesn't matter who you are called to share it with – someone you know or someone who may be a stranger to you or even outside of your comfort zone. But you can trust those Holy Spirit moments when you are told to do things that may seem a bit risky. You can trust that you will be given a peace that quells your fears. You will be given the words to say. You will be sent to the one who needs most to know what you are there to tell them. There are people in our world today who are desperately hungry to hear a word of God's grace for them. The world needs to hear those words of good news. We have been given the gospel, not to keep all to ourselves, but to share; not only the ordained, but all of us. Amen.