**Companions on the Journey May 16 2021 Acts 8:26-40**

As I look back over my life I am ever so thankful for the companions who have shared the journey with me. I had two great friends in primary school who were loyal and accepting. In teenage years my local minister was the primary person to help me enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and he did a fantastic job of helping me and my peers grow as people and in our faith in God. In my mid 20’s a wonderful lady in New Zealand helped me to be more open to God’s Spirit, over the next decade a group of friends journeyed with me as I embraced my individuality and journeyed towards marriage, a different group again were there to journey with me into parenthood and into widowhood, sole parenting and the loss of parents. For a few years, close companions seemed sparse, but then some others joined my journey and my faith was revitalised. We shared times of great joy and great grief, and they supported my journey of candidating and training as a Minister of the Word. Now of course I am enjoying sharing this part of my journey with you, and having the privilege of sharing in this part of your journeys.

Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch were on a journey.

Philip was an apostle, one of the twelve, he journeyed with Jesus, we see his presence recorded in various gospel stories.[[1]](#footnote-1) He always seems to have been approachable and keen to help others to discover Jesus. In the early days of Jesus ministry he encouraged Nathanael to see for himself what Jesus was like, later some Greeks approached when they became curious about Jesus.[[2]](#footnote-2) He was one of the early deacons and he had been sharing the good news about Jesus in Samaria prior to this event. Later in life he continued his work as an evangelist and his daughters were recognised for their prophetic ministries.

**He got up and went.**

Philip was led by an angelic messenger to leave Samaria and travel towards Gaza. He got up and went. God spoke and he got up and went. Sometimes our lives take sharp turns. Many years ago, I nursed a lovely old lady who felt called to serve as a missionary house parent in PNG when she was 54 years old. She and her sisters served there for 16 years, prior to that they operated a drapery store. To be open to a dramatically different path in life requires courage. Even to change our thinking about issues requires courage and humility. Changing ingrained habits requires courage, persistence and resilience. Yet whatever our stage of life sometimes God calls us also, to make a radical change.

**He ran**

God again spoke to Philip and told him specifically to go and meet up with our other character, the unnamed Ethiopian Eunuch. This time Philip not only goes but he runs. We don’t hear of many people running to obey God in Scripture, we sometimes hear of them running to disobey. There was an urgency about this opportunity. He needed to act in a timely fashion and he did. I recall with great gratitude, when I was processing my sense of call, that one of my companions along the way pointed out to me a subtle feature in Caravaggio’s painting of “The Call of Matthew”. Jesus beaconed to Matthew, he looked stunned that Jesus could be calling him, but even as Jesus did this his feet were pointed straight ahead. He was calling, but he was also ready to keep moving. I recognised for me it was time to get moving. Sometimes we can spend so long contemplating the next aspect of our journey, when really we just need to get moving, to take some action, to take the next step.

To the people of the ancient Israel, Ethiopa was seen as the most remote part of the world, so this man was the ultimate foreigner. Being a Eunuch, he would have been ostracised and ridiculed, his non-gender conforming status would be maligned. Somewhat surprisingly, he has encountered the faith of Israel and sought to understand it, even to the extent of making a sacrificial pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem to worship God. However his status would mean that he would not be permitted to enter the Temple, in fact he would never be permitted to enter.

**He came alongside and sat with him**

After this experience of permanent exclusion he continues to read from his Isaiah scroll as he travels, then Philip enters his journey. Philip is invited to come up into the chariot and sit with him. Philip ignores the barriers, of ethnicity and sexuality and sits with him. He accepts the Ethiopian’s hospitality and seeks to connect with him. He sits with him and helps him understand the Scriptures. He shares the story of Jesus with him and the man’s life is changed. The story is reminiscent of Jesus post-resurrection encounter with the travellers on the road to Emmaus. There also, the people’s eyes were opened to who Jesus really was as their companion shared the Scriptures with them. There is something very powerful and life giving in sharing together, exploring together as we seek to understand Scripture. Philip began with what the man was considering and related this to the good news of Jesus. So often Christians can get caught up in disputes about details in Scripture, forgetting its very practical purpose of revealing God to us in the story of Jesus, illuminated by God’s Spirit.

I began today by talking about various people who have come along and sat with me, journeyed with me and helped me to see God more clearly. I’m sure you also have such a list. This story challenges us to think of who we are journeying with. Who are we sitting alongside? Can we identify some people who really need someone to move closer to them at the moment? Who are we sharing Jesus with?

It also reminds us of the great value of getting together and talking about Scripture. It reminds us that we learn so much from each other as members of the body of Christ. It reminds us that meeting in smaller groups often gives the opportunity for more meaningful conversations. The small groups that we have within this congregation can give this type of opportunity.

**As they were going along**

For the Ethiopian Eunuch this little encounter was a life changing event. As they were going along, he has so embraced this message of Jesus he asks to be baptised, and Philip baptises him. He can now enter fully into the worship of the God of Israel revealed in Jesus. He can be an equal member in the body of Christ. For the early church this reinforced that they were called to share the message of Jesus with everyone, to the ends of the earth, and it showed that all were welcome in the Christian community.

**He was snatched away**

Philip’s role here finishes quite abruptly. The text says “the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away”[[3]](#footnote-3) and “Philip found himself at Azotus” [[4]](#footnote-4)and again he begins sharing the message of Jesus there. Philip’s role in this man’s journey was complete, it was time to engage with others. So too for us, there are times when we need to move on, times when we take up new ways of engaging in the work of God in our communities.

The Eunuch was filled with joy and continued on his journey. The work of God in our lives is often accompanied by a sense of joy, a joy that others may notice. The source of our joy may give us opportunities to share with others, more of why we have chosen to journey with God.

So as a new week begins why don’t you take some time to look at your journey. Give thanks for the companions you have had on the way, consider where God may be taking you now. Prayerfully consider who God may be calling you to sit alongside in their journey. If you are not involved in one of the current small groups you may like to consider joining one of these, or one of the ones that will be happening throughout the year.

1. John 6;5; 14:8 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. John 1:43-46; John 12:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Acts 8:39b NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Acts 8:40a NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-4)