

Acts 8:26-40 Ps. 22:24-30 1 Jn. 4:7-21 Jn. 15:1-8

May the words on my lips and the meditations of our hearts
be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer.

Amen

(*Love From Below*, Bell & Maule, 1989, p. 92-93)

Today, the Spirit has a baptism to accomplish,
in the middle of nowhere, along a wilderness road.

While the general populace might entertain notions
of baptism as ‘sin management’ – and why not? –
for John the Baptizer came preaching repentance of sins,
the Episcopal branch of the Jesus Movement understands
that baptism encompasses and accomplishes so much more!

In contrast to the Baptist denomination,
within which I was raised up,
our Anglican tradition has accepted the baptism of infants.
Although the theology has its flaws,
expressed by a family’s desire to ‘get the baby done’.
For, of what, does a newborn need to repent?
For what, would God damn a baby to eternal hellfire,
should something tragic happen and its life be cut short?

Still, it does ultimately support a crucial belief of mine;
a theology of ‘Original Blessing’ as opposed to ‘Original Sin.’

Think about Jesus inviting us to become like children, in order to enter the kingdom of God.

If one does not buy into a theology of sinful at birth (or earlier depending on your pro-life/pro-choice views), then why gather as a community of faith for baptism, as we will on May 23rd, Pentecost, if not for cleansing of sin?

We can take a hint from the pages of early Christianity focused on the ***life-saving, life-renewing, life-giving*** Spirit of God.

Today's episode transpires where one would least expect it, but even more so, it involves a least-likely candidate – an unnamed, titled man of the highest rank serving the Queen of Ethiopia, a member *within* the court circle, but deemed *outside* the faith circle, in traditional, religious thinking.

But then again, that 'epithet' was applied to Jesus as well!

Keep in mind that by requesting baptism for himself, Jesus was *identifying* with *all* of humanity, *all* of creation; 'to fulfill all righteousness' as Jesus told John;

alternatively translated ‘to bring to completion or perfection.’

(Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible, p.147)

So what exactly is the Spirit going to accomplish,
by facilitating an encounter in the middle of a desert place
that in short turn results in a baptism,
where a bit of water happens to be handily nearby?
There’s a lot of non-coincidence there, you know?

However, before we get into the actual weeds,
remember from synoptic gospel accounts of Jesus’ baptism
that His serves as the revelation or theophany of God
to *proclaim Jesus’ belovedness*!

And because we are made in the image of God, ***imago dei***,
it stands to reason that as Jesus is, so too are we beloved.

We too are *named* as *beloved* children of God.

But... too many of us, Christians and otherwise,
who sit as judge and jury,
would run through a litany of all those who fall short,
who don’t qualify, and that would include ‘the eunuch’.

He had power and prestige, wealth and rank,
but... physically? Sexually?

Pious, religious types would suggest
that he doesn’t measure up – to be ‘in’ the kingdom.

So where does that leave him? Where does he stand?
Where do any of us stand for that matter,
when standing in judgment?

Isn't it possible to have everything, and yet nothing,
if there is a vacancy, a hole, an emptiness inside,
self-inflicted or imposed,
that longs to be made whole again?
I suspect that is the case in our Spirit's adventure
that we hear about in Acts today
(or Luke's gospel 2.0 as I sometimes refer to it).

Philip responds to the angel's dictate, "Get up and go".
And as the text states, "He got up and went."
The devout eunuch was returning to the palace in Ethiopia
after worshiping in Jerusalem.

While at worship, he'd have been relegated to the margins,
outside, in the Court of the Gentiles,
having been prevented from entering the temple.

A rhetorical question I often ask is,
"Who is worthy?" or "Who is beloved?"
Put another way, "Whom does God exclude?"

The Spirit would like to address that question!

This man is no doubt relating in a very deep way to this passage of scripture that he is reading from Isaiah, known as 'The Suffering Servant'.

How many countless ways might he have already suffered? He is trying to understand whom the text is about.

Philip, kind of out of the blue,
comes alongside the chariot and opens-up its meaning.
As Tom W. pointed out at Bible study,
is this not like Jesus opening up the scriptures
on the road to Emmaus?

In a move that sounds breathless and sudden,
much like a scene from Mark's gospel,
the eunuch spies water and bursts out,
"Look here is water,
what is to prevent me from being baptized?"
What is to prevent him from being baptized?
I do believe the Spirit sharpens her eyes,
giving a piercing look at those who would *attempt*
to exclude anyone from receiving the Holy Spirit.

Divine mission accomplished!

No sooner has the man emerged from the water,
then Philip is *snatched up*,
and sent north along the Gaza strip to the city of Caesarea,
proclaiming the good news along the way.

Can you imagine the good news this man would have come
to know and absorb in the very depths of his being?

Can you imagine as Sandy asked,
how incredible it is that God would have chosen Philip,
a pretty important person among the apostles
to go minister and help this supposed outcast believe?

Prior to this,
Philip had been evangelizing and healing in Samaria.
“The crowds with one accord paid attention to what was
being said by Philip, when they heard him *and* saw the signs
that he did. For *unclean* spirits, crying out with a loud voice,
came out of many who had them, and many who were
paralyzed or lame were healed. So *there* was much joy in
that city.” (Acts 8:4-8)

Seems like a significant detour, a cost with minimal payback!
Or was it?

It turns out that a whole lot more *was* accomplished, by the planting of that one seed in those baptismal waters, beyond the obvious benefit to this individual of the ***life-saving, life-renewing, life-giving*** Spirit of God.

Our Book of Common Prayers affirms that baptism is *full initiation* into Christian community!

How can that be if there was no Christian community present at the eunuch's baptism?

Oh, but there was! For where two or three are gathered together in my name, Jesus says, I am with them.

And... would we not agree that the Trinity was present?!

But what about the church's catechism?

What about preparation and certificates and such?!

I'd suggest that the eunuch had been in preparation for this moment, his whole life.

His identify is no longer a label of eunuch or treasurer, or any other manmade imposed epithet.

He understand himself now to be a beloved of God, a child of God. Welcome the children unto me, Jesus said.

The Ethiopian's joy becomes a catalyst for the growth of a Christian community present to this day.

Historical evidence points to the fruit of this encounter and the labor of his faith.

[Church Father St. Irenaeus](#) wrote regarding the Ethiopian eunuch, "This man ([Simeon Bachos the Eunuch](#)) was also sent into the regions of Ethiopia, to preach what he had himself believed, that there was one God preached by the prophets, but that the Son of this (God) had already made (His) appearance in human flesh, and had been led as a sheep to the slaughter; and all the other statements which the prophets made regarding Him."

(Against the Heresies, an early anti-Gnostic theological work 3:12:8 180 AD).

In [Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo](#) tradition he was referred to as Bachos and is known as an Ethiopian Jew with the name [Simeon also called the Black](#), a name used in [Acts 13:1](#).^{[3][4]}

Upon His return, Jesus commissioned his disciples,
"... **Go! Go!** Make disciples throughout the world,
to the ends of the earth, baptizing them in the name of the
Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...

And remember, **I am** with you always, to the end of the age."

(Mt 28:18-20)

An interesting thing happened to Jesus,
when The Holy Spirit, like a dove, alighted upon Him.
Jesus was propelled, activated into public ministry.

The *same energizing power* strengthens us to live
into the God way of life, into baptismal ministry,
not for the sake of judging but for the sake of healing.
That same energy force of the Holy Spirit propelled her way
into Ethiopia based upon a miraculous encounter on a
wilderness road in the middle of nowhere,
in the sanctuary of the human heart ready to receive her.

Amen!

Amma Susan+