

The Hand of God

The Invitation to Faith

Acts 8:26-40

- Last week we reflected on Paul's conversion story (Ephesians 3:1-13; Acts 9:1-9)
- Paul's pre-conversion activity resulted in the dispersion of the church (Acts 8:1-4)

- Philip went from Jerusalem to evangelize Samaria (Acts 8:5) where many were converted (Acts 8:6-8)
- In this ongoing expansion of the church we see the hand of God at work and the invitation to faith

A Listening Heart

Acts 8:26-31

A Surprising Request

- An angel of the Lord tells Philip to leave Samaria (city) and head south into the wilderness – leave a successful crusade to go into the middle of nowhere
- A request instigated by God – the entire Gentile mission

Philip Obays

- He heads into the wilderness



A Surprising Encounter

- He meets an Ethiopian pilgrim reading in a chariot
- He happens to be a court official to the queen of Ethiopia (v27)

The Spirit Prompts Philip

- Approach the chariot
- A socially unacceptable move to approach a person of higher status

- Philip hears that the official is reading a text from Isaiah 53 on 'the Suffering Servant'
- Philip engages the official in conversation

Scripture Needs Interpretation

- The official's response, "How can I unless someone guides me?" (v31)
- We need to help others understand what the text means
 - it is not always self-evident

Philip Is a Model

- The Spirit is the Protagonist in the story – Philip is listening for the Spirit's guidance
- We need to provide space in our lives to listen for God's voice
- Read scripture/listening prayer/spiritual disciplines

A Seeking Heart

Acts 8:32-38

What the Ethiopian is Reading

- The prophet, Isaiah 53 – the text speaks of an individual who unjustly suffers on behalf of others (v32-33)
- It is a mysterious text

A Nuanced Question

- The Ethiopian asks, not “What does this mean?” but “Who is the writer speaking of – himself or someone else?”

- This question becomes a launching point to explain the good news about Jesus (v35b)
- The passage has overtones of the story of Jesus and 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus

A Seeker

- The official presents himself as someone open and receptive to spiritual truth
- He is intentional, proactive, truly seeking to connect deeper with God
- What is our desire to go deeper?

A Desire for Baptism

- The story climaxes with the Ethiopian spotting water (‘Behold water’!) and requesting baptism (v36)
- Philip graciously responds and baptizes him there in the pool of water

The Conclusion of the Story

Acts 8:39-40

1. The Spirit snatches Philip away to keep ministering
- he finds himself in Azotus (v40)

2. The Ethiopian continues on 'the Way' and goes forth in joy (v39)

3. The story presents the compassionate heart of God
 - Reaching out to all peoples
 - The story anticipates the Gospel reaching all the peoples of the world

4. The story points to the mysterious work of God as his hand covers our lives
 - The perfect timing of Philip meeting the Ethiopian

Our invitation is to be sensitive to God's overtures and to have a heart of faith that says 'Yes'