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**Fifth Sunday of Easter 2024  
Year B**

Acts 8:26-40  
1 John 4:7-21  
Psalm 22:24-30  
John 15:1-8

*Alleluia! Christ is Risen!*

*Response: The Lord is risen, indeed, Alleluia!*

I had seen him working in the store many times. He was always a friendly cashier and we mostly chit-chatted about the usual grocery store things- the lines, the crowd, and the weather. That day was different. He was stocking shelves and he stopped me with a question. Are you a pastor? His question took me off-guard. After years of wondering and sometimes wandering in the wilderness, I had recently decided that ordained ministry was not my call and stopped listening for the Spirit's direction for my life.

During Eastertide we are reading from Acts, the story of the early Christian community living into the death and resurrection of Jesus. It is the story of "getting up and going" as the community is led by the Holy Spirit.

Growing in numbers and in their understanding that God's love is for everyone, the community doesn't have a smooth ride. As the early Christians share the good news and lead others to join them, they are stretched, and they are challenged.

There is disagreement among the members and the leaders. They are at odds with the Empire and with the Temple leadership. They are persecuted.

Sometimes, they believe they know where they are headed, only to have the Holy Spirit lead them somewhere unexpected. The disciples, like Jesus, cross boundaries, showing those around them how God's love embraces everyone. Abiding in God, acting from and through God's love.

Philip is already traveling before we meet him today. He is one of seven disciples designated to serve at the communal table because the distribution of food was unfair to the Greek-speaking widows. These seven are often referred to as deacons. Soon after accepting the ministry of serving the hungry, however, Philip is among the disciples who flee Jerusalem because Christ believers are being persecuted. Stephen, another of the seven, has been killed while he is preaching. Philip heads to Samaria, where he heals the lame and casts out demons. He also baptizes Samaritans, resulting in a visit from Peter and John.

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In today's reading, we see Philip as he leaves Samaria at the command of the Holy Spirit to "get up and go" to the wilderness. He does it without fully understanding why he is going or what he will encounter. Once there, he obeys the Spirit's nudge to approach the chariot of a high-ranking official in the court of the Ethiopian queen. The official is wealthy and educated—and a eunuch. He is reading a scroll of the Prophet Isaiah while he is returning from a trip to Jerusalem to worship at the Temple. The eunuch invites Philip into his chariot and asks for help understanding the meaning of the specific section of Isaiah he is reading. The eunuch may see himself in this passage. Eunuchs were frequently marginalized. As accomplished as he is, it is unlikely that this official would be allowed in the assembly of the Temple, one of many humiliations he suffered over his life. He and Phillip have never met, and yet, one offers hospitality and the other accepts.

Through their conversation, which includes Philip's proclamation of the good news about Jesus, the eunuch is moved to ask for baptism (after noticing water). The eunuch's confidence demonstrates that he understands the Easter message and embraces the declaration that God brings new possibilities to places and people that might have once seemed "far away" (2:39) to some.<sup>1</sup>

Philip, grounded in the tradition of the Torah and the prophets and transformed through the resurrection of Jesus, listens to the Holy Spirit, and baptizes the eunuch. The eunuch recognizes that he is included in this community and that God's love is truly for everyone, including him. The official goes on his way, rejoicing. Tradition tells us that he preached the good news of Jesus to Ethiopians, starting the church there.

This encounter between Philip and the eunuch is far from a one-sided transformation. Philip, following the command of the Holy Spirit, is apparently changed. He responds to the man's request for baptism without hesitation. He abides with and is so deeply anchored in, the love of God and the teachings of Jesus, that he loves unconditionally and acts in the freedom of that love. Philip goes on to continue spreading the Gospel wherever the Spirit takes him.

The day the grocery store employee stopped me, he was in the process of significant change in his life. It was the first time I had seen him in a skirt. I believe that whether he knew it or not, he listened to the nudge of the Holy Spirit to talk with me. We talked, not about lines, or crowds, or the weather, but about prayer and God's inclusive love for everyone. After that conversation, I never saw him in the store again.

This interaction was the first of a series of "unexpected" conversations that led me to "get up and go" to places I didn't expect and to step into ministries that I hadn't previously considered. Looking back, I know that the Holy Spirit was at work in each of those experiences, opening me to the joy of the resurrection and nudging me to bring God's love into the world.

Perhaps you have had similar experiences with the Holy Spirit leading you to new ministries.

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Maybe you've been changed by a conversation with someone at the food pantry or a neighbor. Perhaps you've been changed as you've listened to our neighbors share their experiences of trying to find an affordable place to live in Alexandria so that they do not have to travel long distances to their work. Maybe the Spirit has moved you as you participated in events in Alexandria that lead us all to reckon with the history of enslavement that still permeates policies. Or maybe you are moved by the stories of people who have left places of violence and economic deprivation to arrive here so they can raise their families in a safer, freer place.

I invite you to share those stories of your change with others to help us to grow in our knowledge of God's movement in our lives as a community.

The Holy Spirit continues to move among us here in Alexandria and at Resurrection. As we continue to discern a vision for Resurrection for the next 60 years. A vision anchored in love. I invite you to consider how the Holy Spirit is nudging us, nudging you to "get up and go." Like Phillip, we are invited to follow the Spirit without knowing all the answers. Like Phillip, we are invited to follow the Spirit as we walk with people who will share their stories and their lives with us.

These encounters change us, moving us more deeply into relationship with God. They move us to live as God's people, to share the good news in a world that values power and authority over love.

We love because God first loves us. We act because God acts in our lives. God's grace transforms us and makes us ready to "get up and go."

And in doing so, may we, as the eunuch did, find ourselves rejoicing!

***Alleluia! Christ is Risen!***

***Response: The Lord is risen, indeed, Alleluia!***

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Skinner, M. Preaching Acts in Easter (Year B). Online. Working Preacher  
<http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?m=4377&post=5122>