

Dear Friends in Christ,

On Thursdays these past 9 months, I drive out to 262<sup>nd</sup> Avenue and Beardsley. Where is that? The location is in Sun City Festival which is in North Buckeye. It sounds far, but it is approximately a 20 minute drive from church. Our church is witnessing and holding Bible classes in that area.

Why are we carrying out ministry in North Buckeye? It is an opportunity to share good news of Jesus in a new and growing community. Will it produce results? We will see. We certainly would like your prayers for this outreach ministry.

We also witness here in Surprise and surrounding area. We learn from the Bible that the church is to continue to witness. You and I are to join in this effort. We do this as God, the Holy Spirit, opens doors. We see this today in Acts: **The Holy Spirit Calls his Church to Witness Christ!**

### **1. The Holy Spirit directs the work.**

We have one of the great examples of witnessing in Acts 8. We learn that the Holy Spirit directs this important work of the church.

A. Philip is one of the original Deacons. He originally worked with the church's program to support poor widows. Now he is working as an evangelist. An evangelist is one who goes about witnessing for Jesus. Philip had been witnessing successfully in Samaria among the Samaritans. In Acts 8, Philip is ordered by the Holy Spirit to leave Samaria to go travel south.

1. He sends him to the region of Gaza. There are not as many people in this area. He sends him to a specific place, **"To the road...the desert road."**

This wasn't random, the Holy Spirit knew where he wanted Philip to be.

2. Next the Holy Spirit directs him to a specific man. He is a wealthy man in a chariot. Philip is to go to the chariot and walk along side of it.

B. We want to notice that Philip obeyed without question.

1. He could have said, *"Lord this doesn't make sense. You are moving from a place filled with people and opportunities to a place that has few people."*

When he saw that he was being sent to help one man. He was a foreigner. His human nature could have led him to rebel and complain, but he doesn't. He is a good example.

You and I must ask for forgiveness for the times we complain when a pastor is called away by the Holy Spirit and there is a vacancy. We must be thankful when we see other congregations flourishing in their fields of labor and we are sputtering along. We must repent when the Holy Spirit gives us the opportunity to witness and we don't want to do it.

2. Our God is gracious in forgiving our sins in Jesus. He is patient with us and even gives us good examples to learn from. We see that Philip did not complain. He did not hesitate. He went and did what he was told.

3. Philip's obedience turned into a wonderful opportunity to witness. The man was an Ethiopian eunuch was from Africa. He was an important official for the queen who ruled his country. We can also tell that he was well educated because he could read. He knew the God of Israel since he had been worshiping in Jerusalem and he was reading from the Book of Isaiah, the prophet.

## **2. The Holy Spirit provides the message.**

This man's faith was not complete. He knew that God had promised a Savior. But he didn't know who that was or the significance of the prophecy that he was reading in Isaiah. The Holy Spirit would provide good news answers. They would come through the message shared by Philip.

A. The Holy Spirit uses questions to open the door for the message.

1. Philip asks a question as a conversation starter, **“Do you understand what you are reading?”** When the subject of religion comes up, people often make rash statements that give them an excuse to not be religious.

*“There is no hell.” “If God is good, he won't condemn nice people.”*

*“There are so many religious beliefs, I don't know what to believe.”* We can answer all these statements with a question. *“There is no hell? How do you know that as a fact?” “God won't condemn nice people? How do you know if you have been nice enough?” “Religion is confusing? Have you ever tried to sit down with someone who can explain the Bible to you and God's wonderful message of salvation?”*

I want to assure you, that there is a question or an answer for virtually any comment. You can use that as a conversation starter. The Spirit will help.

2. Philip gave the Ethiopian man a chance to respond. He responds, **“How can I unless someone explains it to me?”** This is an honest question from a searching heart. This opens the door for Philip to help.

Please note that not everyone wants help. Some conversations will end quickly. We move on to the next person. Some people are searching. The Holy Spirit will work it so that we can give an honest Biblical answer.

3. Finally the Ethiopian asks, **“Who is the prophet talking about?”** The reason he is reading the Bible is because he realizes he needs to be in a right relationship with God. He needs someone to tell him what Isaiah is saying and how it helps him personally.

When someone is ready to talk about God, they are telling you that they are spiritually thirsty. They want to know how God can help them. As we share God’s word in the Bible we can satisfy that thirst.

B. Philip shares the living water of the Gospel in Isaiah to help this spiritually thirsty man.

1. The words the Ethiopian was reading were from Isaiah 53:7,8. In this passage the prophet is talking about Jesus. Isaiah saw the Lord’s Servant, the Savior, being led to slaughter that is his death. But he sees that Jesus is silent. He does not protest. God’s Son is suffering humiliation which he did not deserve. He is being deprived of justice. The one who was to be the King and Savior will die and it seems he won’t have many “descendants”, that is followers.

Remember that the Jewish people envisioned not of a suffering Savior, but a glorious Savior. When the Ethiopian struggled with understanding this passage AND struggled with his own sin and guilt, the Jews weren’t much help.

2. Jesus is the key to this passage and to anyone’s understanding about salvation. It is all about Jesus. Philip began to explain. Jesus is suffering in Isaiah 53 because he is carrying our sin and guilt. Someone had to pay for our sins to bring us peace. So, Jesus carried a wooden cross outside of Jerusalem and suffered and died on that cross.

There was good news. Jesus rose from the dead three days later! This showed that the Ethiopian’s sins were gone, and he was at peace with God. This is what the man was searching for and God gave it to him.

Before you and I can witness to someone, we must drink in the good news. Jesus is the answer to your sins. He died and rose for you. Jesus is your peace for time and eternity. When we own that by faith, we can share it with others. When someone owns the good news by faith, their thirsty soul is satisfied. Their most important questions are answered. That is why the

Holy Spirit has us witness about Jesus.

### **3. The Holy Spirit produces fruits of faith.**

Jesus promised that when his disciples are attached to him, they will bear fruit.

A. The Eunuch bears fruit in two ways.

1. He requests Baptism. Every Christians will want that sacred connection with Christ that comes through the waters of Holy Baptism. The Sacrament provides assurance for all believers that they are a child of God and under his gracious care.

2. The Eunuch went on his way rejoicing. A fruit of faith is that at least deep down we have constant joy in Jesus. He could have dwelt on the thought that the devil would set traps to destroy his faith. He could have worried about persecution in his country. We are simply told he went away filled with joy.

Christians face many challenges, but we need to have joy, if not on the surface then at least deep down. Jesus has saved us. We have life in him.

B. Another fruit of faith is found in Philip. He continues to witness. The Holy Spirit gives him new opportunities going northward, up the east coast of Palestine. He spoke of the good news in towns and cities.

As long as we are on earth, Jesus will have us produce fruits of faith. An important fruit of faith is witnessing. Our whole life is a witness for Jesus. Expect that Jesus will give you opportunities to share good news in a world that often hears only bad. As you witness remember the Holy Spirit will help.

Conclusion: The WELS is opening 7 new missions according to the latest “*Together*” news bulletin (4/19/18). That should make us happy. The Holy Spirit has been busy, and he has only just begun in those places.

The Church is called to witness. You are called to live for Jesus and at times to speak for him. The Spirit is with you. He is God. He will accomplish his goals. What a blessing that he uses us and the people of his church to do this work as a fruit of faith in Jesus. We live because of Jesus. We witness because of Jesus. More people come to know Jesus! That is a reason to rejoice. Amen.

FIRST LESSON - Acts 8:26-40 (NIV 2011)

26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” 27 So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian[a] eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means “queen of the Ethiopians”). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, 28 and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. 29 The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.”

30 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked.

31 “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

32 This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

“He was led like a sheep to the slaughter,  
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
so he did not open his mouth.

33 In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.

Who can speak of his descendants?

For his life was taken from the earth.”[b]

34 The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” [37] [c] 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. 40 Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

*Footnotes:*

*Acts 8:27 That is, from the southern Nile region*

*Acts 8:33 Isaiah 53:7,8 (see Septuagint)*

*Acts 8:37 Some manuscripts include here Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” The eunuch answered, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”*