



Pastor Ken's Sermon

SERMON – 5TH EASTER

ACTS 8:26-40

MAY 2, 2021

“WHEN THE MOMENT COMES”

English author C.S. Lewis said, *“a saint is someone who makes God believable.”* Saint is quite a freighted word. It suggests extraordinary faith. Since in the New Testament it is used most often in Revelation, we assume someone has to be dead to be one. To officially be one in Roman Catholicism of course...you do. Jesus never used the term when speaking of his followers, preferring “students”, “disciples” or “little ones.” The Apostle Paul used it however – usually at the start of letters to the churches he wrote, as for example *“to all in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints.”* He was not writing to the dead. Paul combined two ideas of what it means to be a Christian in that greeting – we are *“the beloved community”* and we are called to be God’s “holy ones”, which is what the term ‘saint’ means.

Now days, (unless you are of the Roman Catholic tradition) people think of saints as hypocrites (as in...nobody is *that* good) or as dreamers chasing a lost cause. I prefer to think of a saint –ordinary ones that is, as someone who brings God to people in the way they speak, listen, stand for what is right and just, enter someone else’s struggle or grief, or give of themselves to where it at least inconveniences them if it does not represent a sacrifice for them.

Saints do so not by force of will or excellent character or proper training, but because they are led by the Holy Spirit. They are saints...“by faith.” Today I want to talk about how a saint might make God believable simply by talking about God. The Holy Spirit alone gives faith, but saints in service of the Holy Spirit make Jesus knowable and understandable.

And oh, but for the “table to be set” to do so like it was for Philip in our lesson today from Acts. Philip of the Holy Spirit is directed to a road that links Jerusalem to a region called Gaza. Gaza was at the edge of the desert. There he happened upon a man from Ethiopia – a royal official, returning home by way of this desert route and pausing to read “out loud” from Isaiah the prophet. And not just any part of Isaiah’s 66 chapters – but Isaiah 53 which we call “the prophecy of the suffering servant.”

It should be emphasized that NO ONE outside of the disciples of Jesus would have had any idea who Isaiah was referring to or been able to connect the dots between this passage about a silent sheep led to slaughter and the events that took place in Jerusalem a few months earlier. Philip had heard John the Baptist call Jesus “the lamb of God” and on the night of the resurrection listened as Jesus *“opened their minds beginning with Psalms and Prophets”* to understand the Scriptures. Set aside any thoughts of Philip as a polished and rehearsed speaker. Take note of what he did – invite and then take a question – “help me understand.”

Call the ensuing conversation what you will...witnessing...faith talk...personal testimony. The beauty of this story is that it occurred not in a packed auditorium in front of thousands of people with a preacher in a nice suit and a big, toothy smile. Nor is this that awkward, difficult moment when you console a friend who just lost their spouse or a lunchroom full of co-workers when somehow someone brings up the latest “scandal” involving a noted Christian and uses that as a pretext for a disparaging

remark about all Christians. This is not the atheist professor laying waste to all you learned in confirmation in your freshman English class.

This is you, the available you, the ordinary saint, and one other person who has a question – who wants to know what the Bible is trying to say and maybe...after a bit...what you believe. It was not all that difficult a question...at least not to Philip. It could have been handled with “*he was referring to the future Messiah of Israel*” and left at that. Philip, no matter how extensively or succinctly he answered, “began” with that opening and told the good news about Jesus. The Spirit created faith – he set the whole meeting up after all. Philip made Jesus believable by making himself available and Jesus understandable.

What are the impediments to witnessing? I do this sort of thing for a living, and I have to tell you – it does not come to me naturally. You would think that God would implant this into us – hardwire us for evangelism – make it natural as breathing. Then again...you’d think that same thing about obedience the 10 Commandments or prayer or anything Christians are supposed to do – so it’s no surprise that sinners who make a shambles of the Commandments fare little better with the Great Commission.

Less than ¼ of American Christians discuss faith with anyone, even other believers, at least once a month! It’s thought disrespectful, judgmental, you’ve been asked not to, it makes other’s uncomfortable, it’s not the right time...and sadly, many harbor doubts if it’s all true. I get it...I’m not immune to any of those sentiments. So, I leave you with this thought today. It is said that of the human species, we who bear the likeness and image of God – it is the male version (guys) who never...ever...ask directions when lost. Yet that is what our story in Acts presents us...a guy asking directions and another one willing to give them.

That is a saint...that is what you have been called to be. Simultaneously a sinner...sure, but that just means you’re precisely the kind of person a Savior like Jesus is fond of. Though less than ¼ of Christians have faith conversations regularly, 1/3 of adults in America say a faith conversation has at the least led them to make a big change in their lives, and 1/3 of new Christians say it was a friend who began that conversation with them. When a heart is ready...the evangelist appears. Apparently, that is true of Americans as it was once with an Ethiopian. Next time we’ll talk about what that evangelist might say...and how. AMEN