

## WELCOME 13<sup>th</sup> June 2021 – 3 Pentecost '21 B

Acts 8:26-40

**Welcome!** It's great to be together. As has become our custom there are Group Study & Discussion resources for you to use *over the course of the week*. As God leads you into the fullness of His word/work in your life he will then introduce you to someone who needs to hear the good news from you. Also... somewhere here today you may feel a nudge - tap - tug. Don't ignore it! That's probably the Holy Spirit prompting you some way. Let's talk about that after worship.

**As we move into this week...** "Good fences make good neighbours" Robt Frost was not the first to recognize the importance & usefulness of fences, boundaries & limits. Of keeping you/your stuff there so me/my stuff can be here. Life is filled w/ fences, limits boundaries. Some are necessary...to protect us from harm or injury. Some...just help us avoid what we'd rather not do....but know we should.

**For** Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews & Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the dividing wall of hostility that separated us. – Eph 2:14

The gospel is a promise that breaks boundaries – transcends borders – breaches walls & calls all who are part of it to live in obedience to its unlimited grace. The good news of Christ is a gift that summons all who have been claimed by it to live in obedience to its world-harvesting life-saving mission to the not-yet-won.

**Go** south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza...Go over & walk along beside the carriage...So beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus."

Obedience isn't simply asking "How high?" when someone says "Jump."

**Obedience** is an act of love from one who is loved that listens deeply, responds faithfully, & acts willingly...promptly. When we say 'yes' to the Father, we are always taken on a Spirit-led adventure & see the power & timing of God on display in amazing ways.

We'll explore & experience that together. Let's pray...then we'll get stuck into it.

### **PRAYER OF THE DAY:**

*Great & glorious God...All authority power & glory belongs to you & your Son Jesus. Thank you that by his life given, we are given life forever. We praise You that no-one & nothing can stop Him from growing His church...from seeking & saving the lost for whom he has died & risen...from opening hearts so people can respond to the good news about Him. Lead us to opportunities to share with others the grace we have received...to find ways of engaging with those who have yet to respond to his offer of hope, forgiveness, life & salvation. Make us ready & able to put words to the hope within us & the love we enjoy in Christ. By your Spirit offer it through our words & deeds...in Jesus' Name...Amen.*

Let's sing...Jesus What a Beautiful Name

### **FAITH CHAT:**

1. Over the course of your life, what "boundaries" were you taught to never cross?
2. What motivates your obedience in life? How would you rate your obedience?

Now we'll sing...All Are Welcome...

### **BLESSING/SENDING**

*May God bless the world in which you move, and bless your home and bless your friends.*

*May God bless the eyes with which you see, and bless the ears with which you listen.*

*May God bless the way you use your hands, bless the way you employ your tongues...*

*And the blessing of almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
be with us now and always. Amen.*

### 3 Pentecost – '21 B – GETTING OUR ACTS TOGETHER: OBEDIENT ACTS

Am I the only one this week who thought we should not let anyone from Victoria into NSW until about 2025? I'm kidding kinda...but after the folks from Melbourne took their Covid test & w/o knowing the results, travelled all over the joint up here & into QLD...fair dinkum...don't borders limits & restrictions mean anything any more?

I learned something interesting about borders...Edna shared a Word for Today devotion @ Ladies Fellowship & part of it was a history lesson about how 2 SEAsian countries knew who was part of which country. Cool story...Seems that <sup>b/4</sup> European colonists arrived in SEAsia, the kings of Laos & Viet Nam knew who was part of which kingdom. If you ate short-grain rice & lived in houses on stilts w/ Indian-style serpent decorations: Laotian. If you ate long-grain rice, lived in houses built on the ground w/ Chinese style dragon decorations: Vietnamese. Each was taxed & treated accordingly by mutual agreement <sup>b/t</sup> the 2 kings.

That reminded me of when I was in Israel <sup>b/4</sup> I came here in 1987. One tour guide was a Jordanian Xn...Arab Xn...On one of our trips he got us out from <sup>b/t</sup> a group of rioting Palestinians & Israeli soldiers. How did he know there was going to be trouble <sup>b/4</sup> trouble started? He said...“When you're a man w/o a country you get pretty good at knowing when to keep your head down.” I had no idea...“I'm an Arab. Israeli soldiers would be happy to let me get caught in the crossfire. I'm a Xn. The Arab Muslims would be happy to bounce a rocks off my head as an infidel.”

I was thinking about him this week reading about the Ethiopian & Philip. Talk about a man w/o a place in life...the Ethiopian is him. He's a guy who looks like he has everything...but he knows he doesn't. Let's just look at him for a minute... Let's get the giggly part out of the way first. He's a eunuch...somewhere in his life he's had the green ring placed around his testicles & they're gone. Some of y'all have done that w/ sheep & know exactly how that works. Odds are his dad was a respected slave in the royal Ethiopian house & as a young boy showed he promise & smarts & was volunteered for a role in the palace near the women. Well you can't be a slave near the women if your manhood is a threat to the men in the palace...OT story of Joseph & Potiphar's wife...that will not happen to this eunuch.

By nature of that pre-emptive surgery he's in the middle world of not-quite-a-man but not a woman. He will never be big & brawny & warrior like. He will never be a husband. He will never be a father. He has had all those worlds closed off to him. He enjoys wealth prestige & perhaps power as the CFO of the Kingdom of Ethiopia but no one ever writes epic sagas or sings heroic songs about the Finance Minister. We don't even know his name...Bill Hayden? This man will not get his face on Mt Rushmore.

**BUT...** Somehow in the various scatterings of the Jewish people, (the Jewish Scriptures) the Law/Prophets have captured his heart & he has become a worshipper of Yahweh His heart is tuned to the God of the Israelites not the gods of his own people. Even here he's in “no man's land.” He has to go on a journey 100s of Ks to worship but he's a Gentile so will always be something of an oddity among Jews & because he's a eunuch will never be allowed to enter the Temple (Dt 23). Not at home in the worship of Ethiopia but not permitted to fully take part in the worship where his heart has been drawn. Still he has gone & is now on his way home having purchased it seems a scroll of the prophet Isaiah...

Scene cut to Philip. **Now** an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza.” In the narrative of Acts...Stephen has been stoned & the church is under persecution & scatters. The apostles are bottled up in Jerusalem, & Philip who had been distributing food to the poor, was first chased north to Samaria & was having a very successful ministry there, but suddenly he's given marching orders to head south on the long lonely road that eventually leads to Egypt...there's Gaza...& then...there's...Egypt. But he goes.

Now here's the thing... Obedience isn't simply asking “How high?” when someone says “Jump.” Obedience is an act of love from one who is loved that listens deeply, responds faithfully, & acts willingly...promptly. By all accounts Philip walks away from a mighty ministry & ends up on the dusty trail to Gaza 180° in the other direction...where the only other traveler is the Ethiopian in his chariot...reading Isaiah. **Go** over & walk along beside the carriage.”

Faith is always an active trust that God is good & seeks to bring that good **TO US** & to the world **THROUGH US** – so again Philip does as God commands. What he hears he immediately recognizes as one of the passages where the prophet promises that one day the Father will send a servant whose suffering is for us & whose humiliation will bring our restoration to life in God's presence. His death will for us become a victory leading to life unparalleled. But as yet the Ethiopian does not connect that servant to any individual...So he asks, “Is he talking about himself or someone else?” **So** beginning with this same Scripture, Philip told him the Good News about Jesus.

So Philip begins right there...He explains the story of Jesus, a Saviour rejected by his people. How his life was taken away from the earth but in dying redeems us from sin & death & evil...every injustice undone. How in his death & resurrection we are reconciled – all of us - to God & to one another. Philip shares the power of the resurrection that rewrites the future for the universe & each one of us. In Christ he proclaims the new creation & the truth that in Jesus Christ all are one.

As Philip explains the good news, the man sees in Jesus someone who knows what it is like to be him...despised, rejected, acquainted w/ sorrow, suffering injustice, at the mercy of forces larger than himself...However, the good news about Jesus is more than him understanding our pain. The pain Jesus experienced, the death Jesus died, was for our redemption. Jesus absorbed pain to take away our pain. He died on the cross so we could have life. He died so the corruption & injustice of our sin, the very thing holding us at a distance from the Father is cleansed & forgotten gone forever. All the barriers boundaries & walls bulldozed so the way home to God is clear.

I suspect they also read a few more chapters of Is & found this: **“Don’t** *let foreigners who commit themselves to the Lord say, ‘The Lord will never let me be part of his people.’ Don’t let the eunuchs say, ‘I’m a dried-up tree with no children & no future.’ For this is what the Lord says: I will bless those eunuchs who keep my Sabbath days holy & who choose to do what pleases me & commit their lives to me. I will give them—within the walls of my house—a memorial & a name far greater than sons & daughters could give. For the name I give them is an everlasting one. It will never disappear!.....I will bring them to my holy mountain of Jerusalem & will fill them with joy in my house of prayer.” – Is 56:3ff*

On the other side of obedience is someone deeply in need of a Saviour named Jesus. On the other side of obedience is someone whom the Spirit has already prepared for the harvest. From every page of the Bible we discover that obedience to the call of God is always counter-intuitive...goes completely against the grain of what our mind or heart says is right... There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. – Pr 14:12

No way Philip should have given up leading a Samaritan revival to head off on the road to almost nowhere...unless of course the Holy Spirit had his sights set on this Ethiopian...No way Abe should tie his son his only son his beloved son Isaac to the altar & prepare him as a sacrifice except in faith that the Lord will provide...No way marching around Jericho over & over again is going to bring those walls down except God has promised that city & that land to his people...No way people under intense persecution, experiencing extreme poverty but possessed of abundant joy can be generous except that’s what the Macedonian Xns were... exceedingly generous & would not be denied the opportunity. *For I can testify they gave not only what they could afford, but far more. And they did it of their own free will. 2 Cor 8:3*

Obedience isn’t simply asking “How high?” when someone says “Jump.” **Obedience** is an act of love from one who is loved that listens deeply, responds faithfully, & acts

willingly...promptly. Obedience understands there is a “play” on words in this passage...the Ethiopian reads in Isaiah about a lamb that is silent before the shearers & “*does not open his mouth.*” Just 2 sentences later Philip “*opened his mouth*” to tell about Jesus...the One to whom Isaiah was pointing. Jesus is the one who suffered so we could be healed. Jesus is the one who was wounded for our transgressions. Jesus is the one who experienced pain so we could experience peace. Jesus is the one who came so that lost, broken, scarred, wounded, despised, outcast rebellious humanity could have life! Somebody in need of Jesus is waiting on the other side of your willing obedience.

Faith is always an active trust that God is good & seeks to bring that good **TO US** & to the world **THROUGH US** – that God is who he says he is & will do what he says he will do...that we are who God says we are & that God’s power is alive & active in us ...against all odds & every enemy...

**For** *Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews & Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the dividing wall of hostility that separated us. – Eph 2:14*

The gospel is a promise that breaks boundaries – transcends borders – breaches walls & calls all who are part of it to live in obedience to its unlimited grace. The good news of Christ is a gift that summons all who have been claimed by it to live in obedience to its world-harvesting life-saving mission to the not-yet-won. **“Every** Christian’s life is marked by ‘windows of opportunity’ that demand they take a radical step of faith in order to follow Christ & fulfil His agenda for their life.” chip ingram

**Take it home...** **Obedience** is an act of love from one who is loved. What’s one simple step you will take this week to listen to Jesus, & respond to his leading?

30 secs... **Go**...I’ll pray for us to close...

Lord Jesus, we know only you can save people. And that’s awesome because we would be lousy saviours. We’d leave out people we don’t like & skip over people who are different or scary. Jesus, we’re even pretty dodgy when it comes to talking about you our Saviour. We don’t speak when we might. We miss opportunities. We sometimes say the right thing the wrong way. Most days it doesn’t occur to us that you have opened a door to proclaim the message of your life, death, & resurrection. Forgive us. And from now on...take over. Use our lives so that your love is known & received by those who are today distant from your salvation. We ask this in your name trusting you to lead where there’s need. Amen.