

## An Invitation to Surrender and Joy

I want to begin this morning by reminding you of one of my favorite scriptures: Paul says in Romans 12:1-2, as rendered in the Today's English version of the New Testament: "So then, my brothers, because of God's great mercy to us. I make this appeal to you: Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer. Do not conform outwardly to the standards of this world, but let God transform you inwardly by a complete change of your mind. Then you will be able to know the will of God--what is good, and is pleasing to him, and is perfect."

The thing I want to stress is this: Those who belong to Christ, those who are baptized into Christ, or who are immersed in Christ (which is what baptism means), are supposed to be significantly different from the people who don't know the Lord. We are not to be conformed to the standards of this world; rather we are to be changed--transformed--by what Paul calls a complete change of our minds. Sometimes we talk about people having a new heart when they come into a relationship with Jesus Christ, and that is true. God promises to remove hearts of stone and to give us hearts of flesh, hearts that are tender and compassionate like the heart of Christ.

But this is only a third of the equation. Not only are we given new hearts we are also given new minds and a new spirit. Our attitudes and priorities are changed from the attitudes and priorities of the world to reflect the attitudes and priorities that come from Christ. We see things and each other through His eyes.

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We view the world through Him. As we said last Sunday, He lives in us and we live in and through Him. Our lives are not all about us anymore; now our lives are all about Him and His kingdom. Before we think of anyone or anything else, we think of Him. His life is our life and His mission is our mission.

Now the more I go on like this, the more uncomfortable a part of me and a part of you is going to get. This conversation is not pleasing to our egos or compliant with our willfulness; it sets our selfishness to screaming "murder!" And, this is rightfully so, because for us to be born again, something within us must also die. New life demands the death of the old. It would be easier if I could tell you that God demands something less, but to tell you that would be lying. Sitting on the fence between our old self-centered lives and our new lives in Christ won't do, because as I heard someone say not long ago: "The Devil owns the fence!"

Hear what Paul says in Romans 6:3-4: "Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." Those who come to be baptized today are proclaiming their intention to die to themselves that they might live for Christ.

In our Scripture lesson from Acts 8, we see an example of what this new way of living looks like. It is significant that the Philip we meet in these verses is not the same Philip listed among the apostles. This we

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know, because the Philip in Acts 8 is listed among the deacons selected in Acts 6, men who were selected to do other work to free the apostles to give full time "to prayer and to the ministry of the word." Philip is said to be among men chosen for their wisdom and because they were filled with the Holy Spirit. Thus Philip can be considered normative for any wise, spirit-filled believer. In other words, Philip shows us our own potential.

Acts 8:26 says, "Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, 'Go south to the road--the desert road--that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.'" We don't know what Philip was doing when he got the call to go down the desert road, but what his going shows us is that Philip was open to hear and to be guided by the messenger of the Lord. He heard and understood a message brought to him by an angel from God, and Philip immediately obeyed that message. He didn't quibble or argue or procrastinate; Philip went where he was told to go. Would you say, "**Philip was available,**" "**receptive,**" "**and obedient.**"

The next thing we see from Philip helps us to understand why Philip was an effective evangelist. Acts 8:27-30 say, "So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, 'Go to that chariot and stay near it.' Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet.

'Do you understand what you are reading?' Philip asked."

What we see here is that Philip was both bold and respectful. Philip was bold in the sense that he did not hesitate to obey the Lord and when he was prompted to speak, and bold in that he did not let the fact that the Ethiopian was a stranger and obviously a man of some importance in the eyes of the world, to cause him to shrink back. Ordinary people didn't ride in chariots or carriages--it would be like the Lord telling me to go wait outside a certain limo.

Philip was respectful in that Philip didn't just barge in to the man's space. God told him to go to the chariot and stay near it. And, while Philip was staying near the chariot, he heard the man inside reading aloud from the prophecy of Isaiah. Philip knew that God had led him to this place, but he didn't say anything until he had been there long enough to recognize the right opening. He then asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" It is at this point that the man asks for help and invites Philip to join him in the carriage. We notice that Philip offered to help, but we also notice that he didn't begin to explain the gospel until he was invited to do so. We also notice that once invited, Philip taught boldly and thoroughly.

Not surprisingly, Philip's ministry was effective; it was God sent. We also know Philip was effective, because the Ethiopian expressed a desire to become a Christian and to seal the deal by being baptized. Baptism is sort of like signing the agreement to pay the mortgage on your house or like saying "I Do," and

exchanging rings at your wedding ceremony. It declares that one way of life has ended and that a new way of life has begun.

We also get a glimpse of the mode of baptism practiced in the New Testament: Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch both go down into the water and come up out of the water. Acts 8:39 completes the story: "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." Acts 8:40 says, "Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea."

Being baptized as believers means positioning ourselves to receive and to be led by the Holy Spirit. It means turning our lives over to new management, the management of the Lord. And, it positions us to receive Christ's joy. It means positioning ourselves to hear from the Lord with a heart and mind to obey the Lord at a moment's notice.

John 3:8 says, "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

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