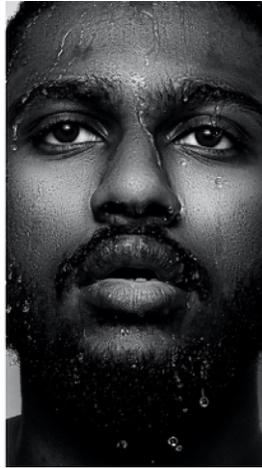


**ALL THE
RIGHT
QUESTIONS:
SHARING OUR FAITH
WITH OTHERS**

Acts 8: 26-40
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**St Andrews Presbyterian Church,
Kamloops**
Sunday 27 June 2021

Do you know this story from Acts 8? It's one of my favourites. It shows the early church, after the Spirit is poured out at Pentecost, reaching out to people of different races and places with the good news of Jesus. The gospel is radiating from an epicentre in Jerusalem to new

countries, new peoples. The church is sharing its faith in the marvellous things God has done in Jesus Christ.

Here we have the very first black African becoming a follower of Jesus. He's a powerful bureaucrat— or diplomat we could call him— from the land the Bible times called Ethiopia or Nubia. (By the way, the modern country of Ethiopia takes its name from this fellow not the other way around!). In any case, this powerful man who serves in the court of a mighty Nubian queen, the Kandake (Candace), hears, for the first time hears that God's Son, Jesus, died and was resurrected not just for Israel but *all* people, including Africans like him (or a European like me). He's then baptized as a follower of Jesus. What a great story to remind us of that the church has a mission in the power of the Spirit to share the good news of what God has done in Jesus for the salvation of the world.

“We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. (2 Cor. 5:20), says St Paul.

- When we gather to worship as a church, we proclaim the good news.
- When we as the church go out into the world and work for good, true and beautiful in job place, school or home, we are Christ's ambassadors.
- And of course when we share our faith with friends or family through a word truth, of justice, of grace, God is making his appeal through us. So it's essential that we share our faith! God's kingdom revealed on earth as we share our faith with others!

Now, do **not** turn off the screen just because I said something about sharing faith! I know Presbyterians aren't always comfortable with the idea of having to talk to others about faith. Some of you are thinking: I'm just not the kind of person. I don't have the right answers. It makes me uncomfortable. I don't have a graduate degree in theology like you—what if someone asks me a question I don't know the answer to?!?

I hear you. *I'm an off the chart introvert so sharing my faith doesn't come easy for me either!* I want to share with you a couple of things I've learned from this story in Acts about how to have conversations with others about faith. Because as a campus pastor about 60% of my work is conversation about faith with students and staff. Some of them are lost, some are found, some running from God, some running to him. I've learned a few things I've learned about sharing the good news of Jesus with others.

The very first thing: **sharing our faith with others definitely takes us out of our comfort zone. And it's okay to admit this!** Let's not pretend otherwise. Did you notice where this story takes place?



26 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south [go at noon] to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

Philip is called by God to go out of the city where he had been working to the desert where nobody wants to be. And in the middle of the day. See the phrase "go toward the south" also means "go at noon" (and some Bibles translate it that way). Back then people used the sun in the sky to tell time and give direction, right? So, *go at noon* into the desert. What do you know

about the Middle East at noon? It's hot. People tried to avoid travelling when the sun is at its peak, especially in the desert. The point: Philip is called out of his comfort zone to share his faith. The Spirit of God moves his church out of our comfort zone to share the good news. I find it makes me (as a super-introvert) feel better just to admit that it's a little uncomfortable when I feel led to talk about my faith with someone. And that's okay.

Yet here's my second point. It's *God* who calls us to share our faith with others. **These conversation where we have an opportunity to speak about Jesus with others don't just happen.** God is before the conversation, he's there during it, and he's responsible for what happens after. This is relief. Indeed, it gives me—us—confidence. Yes, sharing our faith with friends, co-workers, neighbours or strangers pushes us out of our comfort zone but God is in and through it all. Let me show from our story. Trick question. In our story this morning, who do you think is the main character? Some of you are thinking: Philip. He does most of the talking. Others of you are thinking: it's definitely the Ethiopian. He's

in the drivers seat of the chariot anyway, right? Philip is riding shotgun. They are *important* characters for sure. But *the* main character in this story is God.

- The story begins with him. **26 Now an angel** of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go...”
- And long before Philip even showed up the Spirit had been preparing the Eunuch to hear the good news. Why else would this man from a culture half a continent away be where he was at just that time reading the Bible? He’s seeking the Truth. God is already at work in his heart! Just as he is in conversation you might have with coworker or a kid whose drifted away from faith.
- The conversation between P and the EE happens through The Spirit. **29 And the Spirit** said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot...”
- And conversation centres on Jesus in his Word.
- And the story ends with God. **39** And when they came up out of the water, the **Spirit of the Lord** carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.”

God builds his church and brings his kingdom come as we share our faith with others. A sovereign work of God. This gives us confidence. Imagine you run into your friend who isn’t a believer and she tells you that she’s really struggling. And you want to say something hopeful. You want to share with her how your faith in Jesus has helped you in dark times. Yes, you feel awkward. God *is* behind this encounter and this conversation. His providence has bumped you into each other at Costco or wherever. And he’s going to use what comes out of your mouth for her good. I don’t know if I be able to handle my sort of work on a secular campus if I wasn’t constantly reminding myself that, like Philip, the Spirit of the ascended Christ is before, behind and in front of all my conversations about faith.

God prepares encounters for us and prepares us for those encounters, even if we don’t feel it or know it necessarily. And what else can we learn from this encounter in Acts 8? Well a lot. It’s a rich story. I want to draw your attention to just one more things.

One really important thing for sharing our faith. **It’s the power of questions.** Questions are the key to great conversations, genuine conversation, especially conversation in which we share our faith. Often Christians hesitate to share our faith because we think we don’t have the answers. Right? What am I supposed to say to this person’s problem or their difficult question. Good questions are often more important than having the “right” answer. Jesus often used questions in his ministry. And watch what happens in our story.

First of all, Philip *listens* to the Ethiopian first of all. He doesn’t talk. He really listens to the Ethiopian who is reading out loud. And then he preaches—NO!—then he asks. Do you understand what you are reading? Simple question. You or I could ask a question like

that to a friend. Then the Ethiopian asks Philip a question. How can I? Look at all these questions! And then Philip jumps into his chariot. No. Then the Ethiopian *invites* Philip into his chariot, or sit down at the coffee booth with him, or to go for a beer, or give him



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- Philip...*heard* (30)
- Philip *asked* (30)
- “How can I understand?”
asked the Ethiopian
- The Ethiopian...*invited* Philip (31).
- The eunuch *asked* Philip, “*Tell me, please...*” (34)
- The eunuch *asked* “What can stand in the way of my being baptized?” (36)

his cell phone number for a call. A relationship is forming! More questions: after reading the passage of Scripture from Isaiah, the Ethiopian eunuch asks Philip to explain it. And finally he asks Philip to baptize him. These two questions are important because they show us that Philip isn't ramming his answers down the EE's throat. He's not got an agenda, he's not pushing a tract at him or knocking on his door uninvited (sorry that's a cheap shot at Jehovah Witnesses!). *He's listening and then responding by asking questions.*

All these questions back and forth are the marks of a good conversation about faith. Questions are one of the main ways that the Spirit changes people. What I mean is that our questions might be how Jesus himself speaks into a person's life a word of comfort or challenge. A word that might transform or convert. A simple question: even how are you *really* doing? Questions are powerful things.

And when Philip asks questions it shows that he's really interested in the Eunuch as a unique person. This creates a real relationship with a person with whom we can share our faith. Some Christians were taught to share our faith with an agenda, or with a lead question we've already got on hand. Like, "Knock, knock, hi there, I wondering if you were to die tonight would you go to heaven?" I'm not comfortable with that. Because then our question don't connect with that person's unique story and needs. Far better to listen, let the conversation unfold, then ask questions specific to that person. A genuine relationship will develop. Like Philip: what are you reading? Do you understand it? Can I join you?

We believe that Jesus is the answer [SLIDE] He's the answer to questions that arise from unique people, in particular seasons and moments of life, with very different sins, fears,



burdens, hurts. Let's listen to those stories, and ask questions that show interest and care. Then share how Jesus has touched our lives with his grace and truth. How we have experienced Jesus, just like Philip did with the Eunuch. Then Jesus become the answer. It's intimidating to think that we should share our faith with others because you have all the answers. It's not intimidating to share our faith if it means listening carefully, asking questions as a relationship emerges. We can all

do that, right? Then sharing with our new friend or old family member how we've experienced Jesus and what we think the Bible is telling us.

So that's a few things I've learned and applied in my own work. One example in closing: I've organized this past year interfaith conversations for UBCO students, which has been a great experience. Our goal is to share faith. Muslims share faith with us, Christians with them, and both with whomever else shows up. Questions are prominent. Why do you believe this? What do Christians do that? etc... A couple of the young Christian women who've been taking part are very shy and don't speak up much. One was mentioning to me that after one of our conversations, a Muslim student contacted her and her friends on Facebook to follow up on a question she'd asked. So they start talking. More questions. Some answers, but really these Christian students are the first to admit they don't know

as much about the Bible or theology as they should. But this is genuine conversation and real relationship. And then a big question from the Muslim student. Can I come to church to with you? I want to hear more about Jesus. So for the past few Sundays this Muslim student has gone over the apartment of these Christian students to watch the online church. We didn't start this interfaith conversations to try to convert. We did it create a space to share our faith with each other! God is behind it all. I hope and pray that this one student will also, eventually, "go on his way rejoicing" like the Ethiopian Eunuch, because he's encountered Jesus Christ.

So take heart and have courage to share the good news. We don't have all the answers. We love others enough to listen to them, and the ask questions that touch their lives we point to the Answer, Jesus Christ. I hope our Presbyterian and Reformed churches will become better at sharing faith! In all this God is making his appeal through us to his hurting and sinful world; his Son is being glorified; and his Kingdom revealed. Amen.