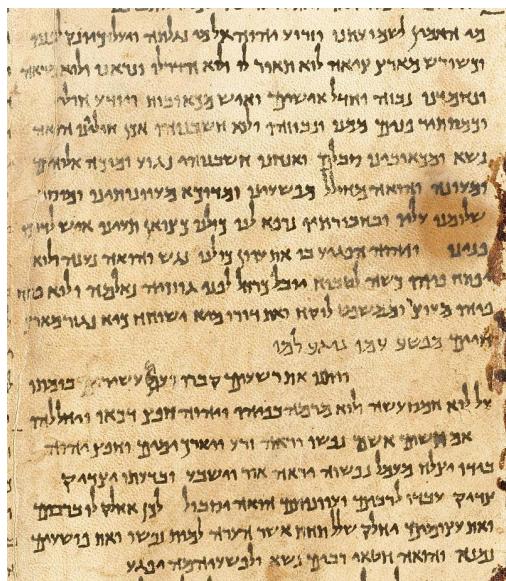


Teachable Moments
By Rev. Todd Farnsworth
Acts 8: 26-39



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 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.” 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(I) 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.... 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.



I'd like to show you something...

This is a fragment from Isaiah Chapter 53, that was found in the 2nd century at a location called, Qumran. It is believed to have been written during Israel's captivity in Babylon and it is probably written not by Isaiah, but by someone scholars know as "Deutero-Isaiah." Deutero Isaiah wrote in the style of Isaiah and their work was blended with Isaiah's to give us the book

that we have today. Through the years commentators have wrestled over this particular text and have come to 15 different conclusions about who the suffering servant of the Lord actually is. The theories range from known prophets of the time--to Israel--to a Messiah yet to come. Isaiah 53 is written in an ancient language and so the interpretation is a bit fuzzy even for the experts.

Still, it had been around for a while by the time Jesus came on the scene. The faith community that worshipped God had been reading Isaiah (and Deutero-Isaiah) for at least 500 years. They were familiar with this image. *Philip ran up to the chariot and heard (a) 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*

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Philip was no scholar, but he knew this story from Isaiah. This Philip (eht evangelist, not the apostle) also knew about Jesus...and Philip was on fire for Jesus! He wanted everyone to know about this Savior who he loved! And so, in a beautiful moment captured by Luke, Philip “teaches” the eunuch about how Jesus fulfills the text from Isaiah. Philip uses the lens of faith to interpret the ancient text in a new way casting Jesus as the Messianic figure of Deutero-Isaiah’s vision from captivity.

Philip seizes on a “teachable moment” to share the good news of Jesus and I believe it is a model that we can seize upon, too!

We know a lot of stories about Jesus. We understand that many of the stories are lessons in faith that can be applied to a lot of different circumstances. It is the calling of our baptism to share those stories as we understand them...and listen to other people’s stories, so that we can understand even more. So we can test our stories against different experiences of Jesus.

Philip’s conversation with the eunuch demonstrates how we can take any moment and use it to share our faith.

This week the President unveiled (for the second time...I guess he was recycling!) something called “[the Green New Deal](#).” In keeping with Earth Day, he spoke about how the program that was written by one of NY’s Senator’s and a few other visionaries, he spoke about how this “deal” could help to save the planet.

I confess I had not read the Green New Deal before this week, but I took the 20 minutes it required to go through it. It's only 14 pages long. I got excited by the possibilities it lifted up for the earth, for our country, for the world. For those of you who haven't read it yet, it describes how we can lower greenhouse gas emissions by the creation of new jobs, by shifting our priorities, by making changes and sacrifices that will ultimately ensure that the grandchildren of the kids in our Sunday school will have fresh air and fresh water to enjoy. The document concludes with these words: *providing all people of the United States with— high-quality health care; affordable, safe, and adequate housing; economic security; and 18 (iv) clean water, clean air, healthy and 19 affordable food, and access to nature.*

Now, I confess that I am not a political expert any more than Philip was a biblical scholar, but amidst the aspirational goals of the Green New Deal were ideas that reminded me of Jesus!

- In the same way that Jesus brought healing to the masses, the Green New Deal aspires to open health care to all God's people.
- Jesus sought to reclaim the idea of community in which the poor were cared for by those who were well off and resources were shared so that nobody went hungry, nobody suffered. We read about that in our Lenten study, some of you may remember how King Herod had messed up the economy by greedily requiring taxes above and beyond his needs to run the government.
- Jesus taught from natural examples: the lilies of the field, the feathers on a sparrow, the seeds of a mustard tree and the fish of the sea. He found life and God's love in the midst of nature because he knew it

was where the people lived and dreamed and experienced the wonder of our creator.

- Jesus calls us to sacrifice as he sacrificed himself. Some of that sacrificing involved giving up places of privilege at a table; some of that sacrificing involved speaking truth to power; some of that sacrificing involved putting himself in the company of those who didn't have as strong a voice or cache as he possessed. Jesus calls us to sacrifice as he sacrificed himself...with the promise of Resurrection when our work is done.

This is the good news found in the green New Deal, as much as it is the Good News found in the 53rd chapter of Deutero-Isaiah as told by the evangelist, Philip!

We have these stories, like Philip knew about Jesus, to tell to those who ask, through the lens of Jesus Christ. We don't need to be experts to proclaim what we have already experienced...but we do need to be brave. In reality, Philip was nobody next to the *important official in charge of all the treasury of the “queen of the Ethiopians”*...but he had an important story to tell...and he told it with the authority of a follower of Jesus.

He told it with the authority of a follower of Jesus.

So, for a moment, on this Earth Day Sunday, I'd like you to think about the stories you can tell with the authority of Jesus. Confessing that we can't be experts in every subject but that we do have a lifelong relationship with Jesus to draw upon, think about what you could teach someone who:

- Invests in energy sources that pollute the environment because addressing the problem would decrease profits
- Can't find the value in recycling their milk jugs or used cans.

- Wonder at how eliminating systemic injustices could help to care for creation.
- Believe that the system is too complex to make a difference (and the system is pretty complex!)

Jesus and the early church were up against similar questions, and they faithfully responded to the concerns of the people around them. I believe that we can respond likewise...in the midst of “teachable moments.” We may not give the answers that folks are expecting, but we can deliver a response that opens the hearts and minds of those who listen to our Jesus-experienced replies.

As (Philip and the eunuch) 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.... 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.

Perhaps the answer that is most needed is an answer that calls people into a deeper relationship with Jesus. We know his stories. We feel his Spirit. Let us share his wisdom in the teachable moments that present themselves to us around issues regarding the environment and other precious concerns.

Amen.