

Easter 5

Today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles has for a long time conjured up a certain picture for me. Two men alone in the desert who come across each other. I quite like that image for some reason. Philip who had come from teaching and preaching in Samaria and a lone eunuch in his chariot. In reality it's highly unlikely the Ethiopian eunuch would have been alone. A court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of her entire treasury, the eunuch was most likely with an entourage of people, some of them no doubt servants travelling along in a 'caravan' so to speak, with horses, maybe camels and packed up tents and supplies of food and water for people and animals. I think that conjures up quite a colourful picture really. Philip does seem to be alone though. As the passage begins. 'Then an angel of the lord said to Philip, "Get up and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.' And it's called a wilderness road. Those two words also do something for ones imagination I think. A road through the wilderness. The wilderness in the bible seems to be a place where things happen with something of a journey to it. Moses and the Israelites were forty years in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt. Jesus was forty days in the wilderness after his baptism, when the spirit drove him or led him into the desert. Jesus fasted, he was alone and tempted by the devil. Now Philip and the eunuch and company are in the wilderness. For the eunuch and his caravan there is a lot more wilderness to go as they travel home after the court official had been worshipping in Jerusalem. There are a lot more miles with a long journey ahead. After his encounter with Philip the eunuch will also begin another journey, as he learns from Philip about Jesus and is baptized.

We hear. 'As they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said. "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" and then we hear how the eunuch commanded the chariot to stop and along with Philip he went down to the water to be baptized. 'when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.' Yes, a journey really had begun for the Ethiopian official. One physical and another spiritual. Although you could say his spiritual journey was already in progress as he had been to Jerusalem to worship, despite not being Jewish. But now that journey had taken another twist, another form, with Jesus entering his life. Now the passage he was reading from Isaiah, was one he could read with eyes open.

God really is at work here. Angel and Spirit are very active. God makes people move and go on journeys. Philip's continued journey means that immediately after the baptism of the eunuch the Lord snatches him away and the eunuch sees him no more. His journey is also a physical as well as spiritual one. Jesus was led by the spirit into the desert after his baptism, and after his temptation, he returns to Galilee in the power of the Spirit. God certainly takes people places. We don't hear of the Ethiopian eunuch again, like we don't hear of a lot of people again after they've encountered Jesus in a life changing way. But journeys begin and the two fold journey for the Ethiopian, both takes him back home to his familiar place in the court of the queen and also takes him home, or on the journey home to be with God in his kingdom. The eunuch will reside in the kingdom of the Ethiopians and at the same time have his foot in the heavenly kingdom that comes to meet us on earth. Perhaps being the only Christian in his land, he might feel the wilderness of being alone. But his joy in Christ, surely cannot prevent him from telling others the good news as the Spirit moves him.

So where are we on our journey? Is our wilderness a place where we're learning more about God as he leads us along? Or is our wilderness a bit lonely and scary, but we're hanging on in there, still learning about God and ourselves, waiting for angel and Spirit to call us, move us and send us? Perhaps in the direction we're already going in, encouraging us along. Or maybe on another path in a different direction to the place God wants us to be, however enthusiastically or trepidly we step along that road.

Let's be excited, that God has a plan for us, or ideas about what we can do for him and with him. And keep an open mind, that where we think we're going in our life could change when the wind of the Spirit takes a different direction. Let's just put our trust in the one who knows best.

Amen