

Staying Awake to the Future
April 6
Summerland United Church

“When he rose from prayer and went back to the disciples, he found them asleep, exhausted from sorrow. ⁴⁶ “Why are you sleeping?” he asked them. “Stay Awake and pray.” (Luke 22: 45)

Jesus never stops asking you to stay awake. Stay awake to the suffering of the world, to our souls, to the amazing miracle of being alive. (T. Sit, 2021)

Threshold and Christ Candle

Trusting that God will provide when times are tough, it not an easy thing to do. Believing that God provided in hindsight when times are good, is so much easier. According to Tyler Sit, in *Staying Awake*, Trusting that God will provide doesn't exempt us from working, and it will in fact often result in us taking more risks and being more purposeful in our work than the comfort the Empire offers – or at least promises us to offer. (p 160)

As we look to our future and consider what God calls us to do and be as a community of faith we need to not only discern how we steward our abundances we also need to be purposeful in the risks we're willing to take to plant and grow new ministries here in our community. (p.163)

God does provide. When we trust this and trusting becomes our world view – gratitude for what we have becomes easy. The next step is to lean into that trust and take the risk of trying something new.

Once there was someone who did such new things, took such amazing risks that people just had to follow him. Once when they asked him who he was he said, I am a light in this world.

Scripture Reading: Acts 8:27-39

Whether you take what is written in the bible as fact, metaphor, myth or story, listen for the meaning it has for you on this day.

Acts 8:27-39

²⁷ So Peter 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, 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.

“How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

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.
In his humiliation he was deprived of justice.
Who can speak of his descendants?
For his life was taken from the earth.”

The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

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?”

And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. 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.

Reader: May God bless our understanding of these sacred words.

All: Thanks be to God.

Reflection

Let's slow this story down, as Tyler Sit says in chapter 8 of *Staying Awake*. The main characters of this story are Phillip an apostle of Jesus and an Ethiopian eunuch – a dark-skinned foreigner from Africa, whose has been surgically altered and was considered another gender, neither male or female. He's come to Jerusalem to worship at the temple, which would have involved travelling 100s of kms across desert and wilderness. His reception at the temple was probably not well received because of the prohibition of eunuchs being allowed into worship from Deuteronomy (23:1).

He's come all this way and not been allowed to worship because of who he was. So with a heavy, confused and possibly humiliated heart he heads on his way. The Spirit of God is not best pleased according to The Book of Acts and the Spirit of God sends Phillip to chase after the chariot.

Phillip has no idea why, no idea who's in the chariot, other than someone with wealth – they can afford a chariot after all – is in the chariot. Phillip, as an aside, in chapter 6 of

Acts has been made the leader of the early Christians – so perhaps he thought it was one of his brethren in the chariot.

So Phillip chases after this chariot, presumably being pulled by an animal of some sort, while he's on foot and arrives at this vehicle presumably hot, sweaty and out of breathe. He hops on, I guess and is all – hi, I'm Phillip, the Spirit of God told me to come have a chat. I guess?

Phillip sees that not only is this person dark skinned, foreign, has money, and probably has some form of clothing or marking indicating his status as eunuch, but is also intelligent – he's reading. And not only is he reading he's reading Hebrew Scripture. This makes for a very curious type of person in the ancient world.

Phillip and the unnamed eunuch converse and perhaps the Eunuch speaks of his reason for going to and his rejection from Jerusalem, to which Phillip replies – well let me tell you a little about my guy Jesus. Here's some good news for you.

After this conversation, which would have been what all of maybe an hour, the Eunuch, so moved by the Good News of Jesus – equity, forgiveness, mercy, welcome for all, a place for everyone – this person, this human being previously humiliated and outcast for who he was – desires so much to be a part of this Jesus movement he asks – what's to keep me from being baptized?

Phillip doesn't hesitate. Phillip doesn't quiz him on doctrine or theology, or ask him to recite the Nicene creed (it won't be written for 300 years). No, what he does is stop the chariot, get out next to an oasis of water and baptize this person.

And then something super bizarre happens. Phillip disappears. Poof. Gone and This person goes on his way rejoicing.

The end.

But what happened next? What did that person do when they got home? Did they return to business as usual and forget all about this amazing experience he's had? Did he just abandon the community of faith that welcomed him with complete authenticity? We don't actually know, scripture doesn't say. We do now that Christianity in Africa did exist in the early 1st and 2nd centuries. So maybe it was this person who took Christianity there and planted a church. Told others the stories he learned about Jesus from Phillip and spread the wisdom, the Good News of a movement where everyone was loved, everyone had enough, where abundances were shared with equity and compassion.

Again. Phillip didn't send him to seminary, or make him write any tests – he sent him off with scripture, the blessing and love of the Spirit of God and joy in his heart, and wet hair.

As Sit says, he made sure the person had a relationship with Spirit and left him to live out faith however he saw fit. (p.188)

I am so inspired by this story because it is so freeing. Sure I'm irritated I spent 5 years in seminary, but I'll get over it. It shows us that we – and I mean all of you – are perfectly capable of planting new ministry.

Phillip shows both trust and faith in the newly baptized member that he will live into his faith to the best of his abilities. Was there risk involved? Oh, heck ya. Could the person go home and confuse the stories? Yup. Use the Good News for egotistical purposes? Yes indeed. Could the person go home, plant a church, do everything right and fail? Yes, to that too.

Yet, without the risk. Without the trust and faith that mostly everyone newly baptised to the faith would get it right, then the Jesus movement would never have gotten off the ground. Starting something new can be very scary, anything can happen. Starting something new can be very exciting, anything can happen.

We're being called to look to the future with trust and with faith. God will provide and we will work with those provisions. We will continue to look at our abundances with gratitude and steward them in purposeful ways, while also taking risks. Creating and planting new ministry here in Summerland. And we will do this knowing that we have been blessed by the Spirit of God, through our baptism, through our commitment to our faith and by knowing we carry the spark of Christ's illuminating light within us.

On June 8th we will celebrate the 100 yr Anniversary of the United Church of Canada. That Sunday is Pentecost the day we celebrate the birth of the Christian Church. On that day we will celebrate the joining of new members, and we will all have the opportunity to reaffirm our baptismal vows. If you have not been baptised and would like to be, this would also be an opportunity for that to happen as well.