

**"The Scattered and the Gathered"**  
The Fifth Sunday of Easter  
28 April 2024  
Trinity+St. Peter's Episcopal Church  
San Francisco, California

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Acts 8:26-40  
Psalm 22:24-30  
I John 4:7-21  
John 15:1-8

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### **The Scattering**

What follows the resurrection of Jesus is easily seen in St. Luke's commentary contained in the Acts of the Apostles. What we see is the conversion of Saint Paul, healings (in imitation of Jesus) by Peter and John, the growth of the church amongst both Jews and Gentiles, the beginnings of the diaconate, the witness and Martyrdom of Stephen, Thomas, according to legend goes off to India, where the church still to this day claims descendance from his ministry, Paul journeys among the churches he founded, Women are called to serve in the young church. Ivoni Richter Reimer, in her book *Women in the Acts of the Apostles* pictures several women who serve in this capacity in spite of Paul's seeming misogyny. Peter ends up in Rome, and Mark and Luke follow Paul. In today's first reading we see Philip first scattered to Samaria and later to an encounter with a eunuch. All of this is the realization of the poet's hope in Psalm 22,

*"They shall come and make known to a people yet unborn the saving deeds that God has done."*

### **The Chosen**

If we follow Philip to Samaria, we see him preaching the Gospel to a people who were despised by the orthodox Jews. Jesus, too, felt drawn to these people – the women he meets with at the well, for example. So Philip follows in Jesus' example, and many are drawn by his preaching. This becomes a strong theme in Acts, the appeal to the gentiles, the scattering of the seed of the Good News to those for whom this was indeed something different. Among the chosen were also those who seemed outside of the call, namely Simon the magician, who seems called by Philip's witness to the resurrection, and the ministry of Jesus. The types of people chosen will grow and become more diverse in time. Women, magicians, slaves, businesswomen, the mentally ill, jailers along with the jailed, Roman soldiers, all of them with others are called by the Gospel, and Peter and John come to greet them and lay hands on them and give them the gift of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Gathering**

But there is one person whom I have left out, the subject of today's first reading – the Ethiopian Eunuch. He encounters Philip on the road, and his reading of the prophet Isaiah is interrupted by Philip's sudden appearance on the road. Just as Jesus explained the resurrection to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, so Philip tutors this man on what it was that Isaiah had proclaimed to the people. Why is it that this encounter is included in the lectionary on this week of Sundays of Easter? Acts has many examples of those who are called in spite of society's dismissal of them. Here it is a man who is a sexual outcast. He too, in spite of his situation is called – visited by Philip at the behest of the Angel of the Lord. The passage from Isaiah forms an ideal entry point for Philip's teaching.

*"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,  
and as a lamb before its shearer is silent,  
so he opened not his mouth.  
In (his) humiliation justice was denied him.  
Who will tell of his posterity?  
For his life is taken from the earth."*

Philip uses this passage from Isaiah to explain to him the message about Jesus, and the Gospel proclaimed by Jesus. The Eunuch, feeling called asks to be baptized.

This is a call to us as well. The church has a bad history of dismissing the ministry of women, the ministry of gay and lesbian people, the ministry of people of color, and in general the ministry of those who are not like us. If we examine the acts of Jesus, his conversations, his healing, his approach to the gentiles – if we really look at these events, we will see a Jesus who was sent as a guide to all people. Whomever God has gathered in, we need to recognize and include.

### **Going Out**

In this morning's Gospel, Jesus compares himself to a fruitful vine, of which we are the branches, producing the fruit. Like Philip and the others we are called to go out, to come out as followers of Jesus. When we're out there, in our neighborhood, in our community we need to be on the lookout for those whom God has called. Perhaps in our acts and behaviors the Good News will be seen. The opportunities that we offer here, openness to the community, cleaning up the neighborhood, having open doors to any who are called to enter, these acts on our part are a part of our Easter proclamation, our witness to a resurrection that is available to all of us. It should be to us as Jesus says in the Gospel for today.

*"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."*

May God lead us to those who are seeking God and God's Good News.

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