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*Open to God's moving – Acts 8: 26-40*

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***How can I understand unless someone explains it to me?*** (v.31) or as Paul later wrote, *Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. But....how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? & how can they hear without someone telling them?*” (Romans 10:14) **Christ called all his followers to people who are to share the good news of God's love. But HOW? We're meant to collaborate with God – but HOW?**

**It sounds like trying to walk on water.** If Jesus is not already standing there, disciples would be mad to try it; but even when, like Peter, we do step out, we don't always have sufficient faith & need rescuing. That applies also to activities we recognise as trying to be obedient & a stepping out in faith – like Holiday Clubs or other outreach for local primary-aged children of all backgrounds; like trying to respond to needs of our neighbours; like trying to reach out through our website, Zoom & You-tube; or prayer or bible study or evangelism. **We can be so focused on our own weakness/limitations that we panic or bottle out. Philip was obedient even when he had no clear idea what he was being asked to do.** Let's look at what happened through 3 different points of view:

**A) PHILIP'S STORY:**

What Philip was doing when an angel visited him is not stated. Perhaps, he was at work, at prayer or even putting out the rubbish. All the angel tells him is that he must go to the Gaza Road (26) He isn't told why or where on the road to go – just to go .....& that is what he does. (27) We're not told how long Philip was hanging about waiting but at some point God's Spirit prompts him to go over to a chariot/ carriage. From this point, Philip gets no more instructions. As he jogs along, he hears the man reading from Isaiah 53 – silent reading is a modern concept. So taking the initiative, Philip asks the man if he understands it. At the man's invitation, Philip rides with him, explains what he knows of Jesus the Messiah & relates his experience to the Bible.

.....When the man requests it, not waiting for approval from the next scheduled meeting of the Church elders, Philip goes ahead & baptises him & then we're told, *The Spirit of the Lord suddenly took him away.*(39) So for Philip, there was then miraculous appearance of an angel & the prompting of Holy Spirit but there was also a good deal of uncertainty- *Where am I going? What am I doing? Why am I here? Who am I supposed to meet?* Philip also takes initiative & responds to the Ethiopian's requests.

**B) THE ETHIOPIAN'S STORY:**

.....The man was Chancellor of the Exchequer for the Ethiopian queen (28) – hence the operation! No man was allowed to hold office close to the Queen & not be sterilized to ensure that there would be no gossip tainting either the honour of the Queen or the line of descent. This government minister was also a worshipper of God or *a proselyte* (meaning that he had accepted the Jewish faith) who had been to worship in Jerusalem. He couldn't convert fully because the operation had de-barred him. Because he had been visiting Jerusalem, he

very likely would have heard about the new Christian Church & the persecution. Perhaps, he had also heard about the death of Stephen, what had happened at Pentecost when Peter and others were given power of God's Spirit to share the good news, & of the Passover, when Jesus was crucified.

.....Now, he was returning home, & as he travels, he was reading Isaiah. Gaza Road was a busy route for traffic & Ethiopian is travelling with his own entourage but somehow, in the dust, noise & general throng, he becomes aware of man at his elbow asking him if he understands what he is reading. Gratefully, he invites the man to join him & explain it. The man connects the bible passage to Jesus & it all makes sense to the Ethiopian. He asks if he might be baptised which is a big question. The Jews would not fully accept him so what about these people? He is baptised. & then left to continue his journey, - which he does, full of joy. The name of this man is not recorded but tradition records that soon after, there was missionary bishop in Ethiopia who was a eunuch, so perhaps....

### C) THE LORD'S PERSPECTIVE:

This is pure speculation but we can imagine. **The Holy Spirit had been at work** in the Ethiopian for years. **The Spirit had brought him** from a pagan religion into Jewish faith & **had sustained him through** considerable personal difficulties. On the visit to Jerusalem, **Spirit has been speaking** to this man. Yet, in a city stuffed with Christians, he was not ready to hear, but on the way home, he is. There are thousands of believers in Jerusalem who could have spoken to this man but there is no one on the road he travels. So the Lord sends a message to Philip: he must get himself down on the road straight away. When Philip arrives, **Spirit shows him** the carriage & **tells him to go alongside just as the Spirit is highlighting** Isaiah 53 for the Ethiopian. During the conversation between the 2 men, as Philip speaks to the Ethiopian's ears, **God's Spirit also speaks to his heart**. When the Ethiopian's heart turns, Lord forgives him & when he prompted into baptism, **Spirit fills him**. There is a party in heaven & the Lord blesses his Ethiopian child by sharing his joy with him. & Philip ends up in the Caesarea port area –P.S. That's where nearly 30 years later, Acts 23 notes he welcomes Paul to stay with him in his family home for some days before Paul went on to Jerusalem for last time, arrest & eventual death in Rome. Philip the Evangelist was where Spirit had put him.

**In reality, there are always 3 stories. Christian ministry, service, sharing is never a purely human activity: it is always collaboration between the Holy Spirit & human beings.** Why did God bother going through the rigmarole of getting Philip to the Gaza Road? Why didn't God just speak to the Ethiopian directly?

**Because God chooses to work collaboratively with the Church: to be present in every believer through the Spirit & then to let the light of God's presence & light shine through the cracks/frailties of ordinary believers, like you & me.** (2 Cor. 4:1-12)

If there was no Philip, there would be no Ethiopian convert. Philip did as he was told. This deacon & Evangelist didn't spend his leisure time lurking about on the Gaza Rd on the off-chance of meeting someone interested in Isaiah. He was a disciple doing what he was told. *I am weak but you are strong. Help each one of us to walk closer with You, Lord, and to be moved by Your Spirit.*