

The Road Of Faith

Texts: Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10
1 Corinthians 12:12-31a (Series C Epiphany 3) Ps. 19
Luke 4:14-21
Free Text: Acts 8: 26--40

"Go south to the road-the desert road-that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza."

Prayer:

"This isn't what I had planned," murmured Jennifer as she tied the apron on her waitress's uniform. In her early forties, Jennifer had just lost her job due to corporate downsizing. Waiting tables would keep food on the table for her three children while she looked for another position.

"This isn't what I had planned," mumbled Barbara as she felt the hard lump in her breast. Some years ago, her mother died from breast cancer. Now it was she who waited anxiously for the doctor to announce the results of her biopsy.

"This isn't what I had planned," moaned Kristine, as she watched the real estate agent put the "For Sale" sign out in front of her one-year-old home. Her husband David was being transferred. They were moving out of province, leaving behind their dream house, friends, neighbours and as far as Kristine was concerned, their dream life.

Often life takes an unexpected turn, and our plans come crashing down around us. Whether it's the loss of a job, an illness, or an out-of-province move, the effect is the same: confusion, questions, and an unsettling feeling of discouragement.

The book of Acts tells the story of Philip, of a well-known evangelist of the early church. Philip had been leading revivals all over Samaria, receiving a great response from the people.

The Holy Spirit anointed his preaching and God's invitation to the Gentiles became clear. In addition, the healing power of the Lord Jesus was evident through Philip as he was empowered to cast out demons and heal the sick.

Every thing was going well, when an angel of God spoke to Philip and said, "*Go south to the road-the desert road-that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza*" (Acts 8:26). Why in the world would God tell Philip to go to a desert road? This man had a thriving ministry! Why would God pull a person out of a thriven ministry and tell him to go to a barren wilderness road? *Or to a parish in the sticks?*

The call came and Philip was told to go to this road on the hottest time of day. You may be guessing that in the next verse, Philip mused, "*This isn't what I had planned.*"

Philip responded to God's instructions with purposeful obedience. "So, he started out." (v.27a). He may not have understood the angel's mandate, but he didn't hesitate.

- ❖ He didn't question God's wisdom. (God, are you sure about this? You called me to preach, and there are no people to preach to on that desert road.)
- ❖ He didn't complain about the circumstances. (It's too hot!)
- ❖ He didn't whine about the personal sacrifice involved. (But all my friends are going to Jerusalem, where the action is! How can you ask me to leave this great revival?) Philip simply obeyed.

The second half of verse 27 explains, "*On his way, he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians.*" As he continued to follow God's leading, Philip was able to tell this man about Jesus Christ and baptize him.

It is believed that this official then carried the good news of the Gospel into the Ethiopian nation. That desert road had been far from deserted after all-a nation had been traveling down it that day! This fascinating story has a truly spectacular ending.

"When they came up out of the *baptismal* water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea" (v.39-40).

After being obedient to travel the desolate road, God brought Philip to Azotus, a densely populated region. He went on his way preaching in all the seacoast cities, probably founding churches there before he finally settled in Caesarea to raise a family.

Acts 21:9: What appeared to be a desolate road was brimming with life! The life of one man, the life of one nation, and the life of the future were profoundly affected by Philip's decision to obey God and go on that road of faith.

When we find ourselves in the middle of a confusing turn of events, we must willfully remember that God always sees the bigger picture. He sees around the next corner, and the next. The desolate road of *accident, injury, disappointment*, and the *unexpected* is not a wasteland, but an opportunity to learn and rely on God.

Our choice to follow God as He leads us down it will affect not only us and our future but everyone we meet along the way- we have an opportunity to touch every life somehow with Christ. The desolate road can be one of life and hope! If we walk in obedience and in faith, we will go on our way rejoicing-even if it wasn't what we had planned.

Last Sunday, the Gospel lesson was on Jesus changing water into the best vintage wine according to the master of ceremony. Changing water into wine is not a big deal, because creation itself is at God's command.

As I eluded last Sunday, *the miracle was a sign to point* to the person of Jesus Christ for who he was, who he is, and who is to come. Therefore, the miracle truly here was that the disciples placed their faith in Jesus as the Saviour. The miracle for us this morning is finding faith in God when life takes an unanticipated turn, and our plans come crashing down.

Only twenty- six days into the 2025 our world was woken up by a horrific wild-fires in Los Angelis. On the news, there was this young woman with her hands up in the air shouting "O God, save us!" as her home burnt to the ground To most the question is where is this God of love and compassion?

It seems God is silent in heaven about the plight of the citizen of Los Angeles, right! But not fast. I am amazed as we all witnessed the responds of help through the international community with resources coming from around the world to ease the sufferings.

If we want to understand Jesus and his followers, we need to understand his very first sermon in Nazareth. What topic did he chose for his first sermon? What Bible verses from the Hebrew Scriptures did he select for his very first message to his hometown crowd? You know the answer. *Isaiah 61 and 58.*

Quoting these chapters in his very first sermon, Jesus said, "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach good news to the poor people, release to those in captivity and prison, recover the sight of the blind, and freedom to those who have been blasted to bits by life. I proclaim the year of the Lord's favour to the poor.*" This was the core of his ministry. This is the core of our ministry together.

Can we dare to believe that we are in this situation to meet with God? Are we willing to trust God when we don't like the way He's doing things? Philip's obedient response challenges us to trust God when we can't see what lies ahead. What's keeping us from that kind of radical trust?

..... But anyone who listens and doesn't obey is like a person who builds a house without a foundation. When the floods sweep down against that house, it will crumble into a heap of ruins. (Luke 6:49).

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour"

For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."

(Jeremiah 29:11)

Amen.

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