
The World Needs The Cathedral of St. Philip

A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler

Atlanta, Georgia

The Feast of St. Philip, Deacon and Evangelist (transferred from October 11)

Acts 8:26-40

I have so many things to say today, and I know the service will be noisy. This is a baptism day! But I should say this: baptisms are not noisy. They are just spirited. This is a spirited day.

It might be almost as spirited as last Sunday was. I have been in this marvelous cathedral for eight years now. My first Sunday was eight years ago last Sunday, when we celebrated with great noise and with Great Spirit the Feast of St. Francis. We blessed animals on that day, and I heard lots of them.

And I heard soul. I still hear soul in this place, yearning to be set free and released for ministry in the world. I have enjoyed ministry here, because I have enjoyed soul.

Since eight years ago, we have also begun observing a second Sunday in October, after Francis. Today is the observance of blessed Philip, blessed Philip the Deacon. The word "deacon" means servant, and it is Philip's example of service that I want us to use as a model for our commitment here.

Consider Philip, just going about his business as a disciple of Jesus. When called to do something, he did it. When they needed folks to serve food to the widows, he was called. He was serving. He was serving in Jerusalem, not the friendliest place toward this new Christian Church, but at least it was home.

But then God led Philip away from the comfortable and into the unknown, into the wider world. The story says that Philip was led to the south, down a wilderness road.

Here at the Cathedral of St. Philip, we are much like Philip the Deacon and Evangelist. Most of us here want very much to do the right thing. We are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, but -like Philip was"" we are much more comfortable doing the right thing right at home.

It so happened that Philip was led one day away from home. He was led out of Jerusalem and into a wilderness road "" a strange road. There he saw a strange man, a man from Ethiopia, a foreign country. The man had an unusual sexual identity; he was a eunuch. (You young children about to be baptized probably do not know what a eunuch is. Go home and ask your parents. There's a lot in the Bible that needs to be explained by parents.)

The angel of the Lord instructed Philip to relate, to relate to this strange man, this Other person.

I believe God calls us at the Cathedral to relate to the Other. It may not mean that we leave home for good. But we are called to know the stranger, to relate to folks outside our heritage, outside our situation.

Some of those people might be in another part of the world, Tanzania or Equador. But maybe they are just in a different

neighborhood in Atlanta. Maybe they are here in Atlanta from another country: Mexico, or Korea, or the Far East. Maybe some of the folks we are called to know have identities that are different from ours (even sexual identities that are different from ours).

To be members of the Cathedral of St. Philip, we are called to be Philippians, relating to the foreigner, the stranger, the other. Well and good; but what are we supposed to do with them?

Two things. We are supposed to share scripture together. And we are supposed to share baptism together. Word and Sacrament. The foundations of faith. Philip took the initiative to jump up into the chariot with the eunuch. He shared scripture, and then he shared baptism. The same two things I hope we are doing this morning!

I want us to do something else this morning. On this feast day of St. Philip, I want us to share our commitment.

We are beginning today a new year of stewardship. Most of you know that, by stewardship, I mean the graceful care of all that God has given us: the earth, this city, our families and lovers, ourselves.

But most of you know that I also mean money and resources! In the next three weeks, every one of us -myself included- will be asked to make another financial pledge to the Cathedral Parish of St. Philip, and I pray that our generosity will be overwhelming.

Strong and committed churches need strong and committed members, members who are like St. Philip. Our stewardship theme this year is "Deep and Wide," like the River Jordan, like the Kingdom of God itself. Certainly there are some folks here who can give more deeply. And we also need our giving to be wider. Some folks here do not pledge at all, or some do not even give. Our numbers need to widen.

Let me tell you about what you are you giving to, when you give to the Cathedral of St. Philip.

You are giving to an institution who keeps alive the spirit of Philip. We know that Jesus Christ meets us here, when the water washes us clean. We know that Jesus Christ meets us here when that word speaks life-giving gospel to us. But then, we represent the courage to relate to those outside our identity. We represent the courage to meet other people with word and sacrament, scripture and baptism

Your money, your gifts, enables that gospel of Jesus Christ. It enables our children's programs, our youth programs, our Bible study programs.

In particular, at the Cathedral of St. Philip, we have an Anglican style of the gospel that the world needs to hear. Our Anglican style, our Episcopal style, is deep and wide. Our biblical study is open and inclusive. It is deep and wide, not shallow and absolutist.

The world has enough absolutism; it has enough narrow-minded and totalitarian interpretation of scripture. The world needs true Anglican handling of the gospel.

The world needs the courage and the spirit of Philip. The world needs the courage and the spirit of Anglican Christianity and the Episcopal Church.

Will these children, whom we are about to baptize, learn to give? Will they learn commitment to Jesus Christ? Will they learn courage and openness to God's spirit? This baptism trusts that they will.

And they will learn from your example. I am talking not just to parents and godparents when I say "example." I mean that these children will learn from the example of every single individual in this community, whether you know them or not.

I invite each of you to commit yourself to Jesus Christ this day; and I invite each of you to commit yourself to the Cathedral of St. Philip. That commitment means sharing the word with each other. That commitment means sharing water with each other. That commitment means sharing money with each other.

When we share word, water, and resources (our money!), we are truly sharing ourselves, our heart and soul.

This Cathedral needs soul. It needs heart and soul. And the world needs our heart and soul, too. The world needs the Cathedral of St. Philip, and the Cathedral of St. Philip needs you.

AMEN.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

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