

“Unless Someone Guides Me”

Tenley and Henry – you know that the Bible was written for you – that God caused His very own words to be written down for you – for your salvation. Don’t worry folks, you’re not left out – the Holy Scriptures are for you, and for all people – for the salvation of the world.

In other words, this account from Acts 8 is really your story. Tenley and Henry – you are like this Ethiopian returning home from worshipping at the temple in Jerusalem. He too worships the one true God – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – the God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And no doubt, he is an intelligent man – after all, he’s a court official for the queen. And he’s trustworthy – in charge of all her treasure.

But he has a problem, doesn’t he? He doesn’t understand the Scriptures. He’s reading from Isaiah the prophet – he hears about this lamb who is slaughtered – but he doesn’t know who this is. “How can I [understand],” he says, “unless someone guides me?” Thanks be to God, He sends His servant Philip to guide this child of God.

You know who Isaiah is talking about, don’t you – this lamb whose life is taken away from Him? It’s Jesus, the Son of God – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That’s what all of the Scriptures are talking about – Jesus, and His salvation. Even the Old Testament is about Jesus – pointing the hearer in faith to the Savior who was to come in the flesh.

But the Scriptures cannot be understood without a guide. Without a guide, you miss how the Sabbath day, or the Passover feast, or the healing of the Paralytic is about Jesus. Thankfully the Ethiopian had Philip to guide him – and thankfully the Lord has given you a pastor to guide you – but the true guide is God the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit works through the Word of God – the Word taught to us in Catechesis class, preached from the pulpit, sung in the hymns, explained by Mom and Dad in bible stories – all so that you may know and believe “the good news about Jesus” – that He is your Savior.

At the root of all the Scriptures (God's revelation of His plan of salvation) is the sacrifice of His Son. That's the Gospel – that the Son of God took on our human flesh – takes on all our sin – and takes our place to pay the wages of our sins. Jesus suffers and dies – shedding His blood to redeem us from sin, death and the power of the devil – giving up His life to defeat death, and assure us of the resurrection of our body and our life everlasting.

That's what Philip taught the Ethiopian – and did you notice where it leads? To Holy Baptism. Because the Holy Spirit has guided the Ethiopian – he understands that Baptism is about Jesus – that God works through this water to unite him to the death and resurrection of Jesus – to understand that Baptism forgives sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe what God promises.

And that's YOU – that's what the Holy Spirit teaches you. Notice I didn't say TAUGHT you – but TEACHES you. As with the Ethiopian, so it is with you, and all believers – that the hearing and understanding and following and faith in God's Word continues throughout our lives. Or, as you've heard me say before – it's the difference between I WAS baptized – and I AM baptized.

That's what God is teaching us in the Gospel reading from St. John. Jesus is the Vine, and you are the branches. "Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."

To abide in Jesus is to remain connected to Him by faith – which means continuing to hear His Word, to receive His gifts, and to follow Him. And the fruit which is produced in you – by your connection to Jesus Christ – is first of all faith, but also, good works. Like Jesus, who abides in you, you sacrifice of yourself for the sake of your fellow man. You set aside yourself to attend to their needs. You love them, as God in Christ has loved you.

As you heard from the Epistle reading, there are many false prophets who have gone out into the world – so "test the spirits" to see if they are from God, or from the world – to see if they lead you in faith to Jesus and His salvation (which is by grace alone) – or they lure you away with their "spirit of error."

What does this mean? Potential confirmands, parents, pastor – it means that the work is not done! Jesus' work of redemption and salvation – “it is finished” – but the abiding in Him and the guidance of the Holy Spirit continues.

So I encourage you to make the prayer we prayed in the Collect of the Day your continual prayer. “O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.” Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, guards your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.