



St Andrew's Parish Church Guernsey

Sunday 2 May 2021 – Easter 5

Readings: The Acts of the Apostles 8: 26-end St John 15: 1-8

Written by Rev Juliette E C Robilliard

Parental care

Looking at you from my vantage point in the pulpit, I'm wondering what sort of children were you? A goody-two-shoes or more like Dennis the Menace? When your parents corrected your behaviour did it go something like this, "Don't play with your food! Eat nicely!" or "Thank Miss Treadgold for that kind and very unusual gift." If we hadn't listened and obeyed, by now we would likely be banned from restaurants for flinging our food around and we'd never receive gifts again noses at something kindly meant though not to our taste. You who are parents will likely have taught your children similar. Chips off the old block!

Divine parental care

In the Gospel, Jesus is talking about related issues. He is the vine and we are the branches and he seeks to whittle away at our rough edges, pruning those stalks that are not aiding our spiritual growth. But, there's a difference between social etiquette and Christian living, which sets a higher benchmark. Whereas it is lawful for us to help ourselves to items from the supermarket shelf and a legal requirement to pay for the same, we are not required to respond to the chatter of the checkout assistant. From a Christian perspective, blanking an individual does not honour them as a child of God. So, what does it take for Christians to practice grace, that enables others to grow in faith? In the reading from Acts, we have excellent candidates to show us what open hearts and minds can look like.

Ready, willing and able

Philip shows us one dynamic. In obedience to God's Spirit, he drops everything to go and stand in the middle of nowhere to do, he has no idea what! Along comes an Ethiopian on his chariot. One can imagine that the man looked imposing possibly with a retinue in train. Philip sees that the man is reading and could quite easily have stepped back to let the procession go by but he acts saying simply "Do you understand what you're reading?" His words fall on receptive ears.

Open heart and mind

The Ethiopian is none other than a court official of Queen Candace, a woman of wealth and stature. He does not look down his nose at Philip but humbly expresses a desire to learn and invites Philip to sit beside him to give him instruction. The man was reading from what we

know today as Isaiah 53, which we associate as foretelling how Jesus would be led as a lamb to the slaughter. With an enquiring mind the Ethiopian asks Philip to whom the writer is referring. Philip seizes the God-given opportunity and shares the Gospel of Christ. No wonder the Acts of the Apostles is called precisely that.

Better the day better the deed

We have no idea what Philip's personality was like, whether he was shy or exuberant, however, what we can tell is that he must have spoken with sincerity and truth, for his words made a massive impression on the Ethiopian. What spoke to him was that the Lord of all, was prepared to humble himself to become vulnerable and sacrifice himself to give life to others. So, when they draw alongside a pool of water, the man says "What's stopping me from being baptised?" There and then, Philip baptises him, then off rode the Ethiopian taking his Christian faith to his homeland. Even today, despite persecution in Ethiopia, Christians are willing to stand up for and, if necessary, even, die for their faith.

What's stopping me?

What does this say to us today? God gives us the choice to ignore his call or to heed it stepping forward to serve him. Sometimes that's much easier said than done. How can we still make our faith relevant and welcome in our society? How can we, as Philip, act when the opportunity arises? Mostly, we are called to see the unspoken need of an individual and quietly offer help sharing the love of God in that way. Despite the many calls on our time, how do we draw others into this church to gain the benefit of what we believe, for their long-term spiritual benefit? How might we all be Christ to others in ways that connect people to God? If you have an idea, please share it. If you can help practically, please offer, you may be hiding a significant talent that is utterly unknown to others. If you are feeling hesitant, remember the Ethiopian "What's stopping me?" When I considered my own hesitation about a calling to be a priest, I found that the only thing that was stopping me, was me. When I trusted God to lead, he helped me to serve. Working together, we can enable every small act of faith to make a church filled with God's grace.

Amen.