

April 28, 2024

5th Sunday of Easter - Mission Awareness Sunday

Acts 8:26–40; Psalm 22:25–31; 1 John 4:7–21; John 15:1–8

“KEEPING THE FAITH”

Martin Luther once said, ‘God our Father has made all things depend on faith so that whoever has faith will have everything, and whoever does not have faith will have nothing.’ The theme chosen for this Mission Awareness Sunday is ‘keeping the faith.’

It has been said that with **love** the more we give away, the more we will have; and of **faith** that the more we share it, the better we will keep it. But we’re often fearful about sharing our faith, aren’t we? If we think about keeping the faith as a journey, perhaps we can pass on to others what we have seen... learned... feared... created... witnessed and enjoyed, in our personal experiences.

In today’s scripture, Philip was sent on a journey. What grabs our attention about this story is Philip’s complete willingness to listen when the Spirit speaks. An angel says, ‘*Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza,*’ and Philip immediately gets up and goes. As he travels down the road, he sees a chariot; and hears the Spirit say, ‘*go over to this chariot and join it.*’ In the chariot was a man from Ethiopia, the official in charge of the Treasury of Queen Candace. He had been reading from the Jewish scriptures, but could not understand what he was reading. Philip came along and together they explored the passage from Isaiah. Then Philip told him the good news of Jesus Christ. As they travelled together their journey brought them to some water. The man asked to be baptized. He knew that baptism was a sign of new life in him, which he embraced willingly. After only a few hours of instruction, the man made a confession of his faith. As soon as he came up out of the water, the Spirit took Philip away to continue his journey of faith, preaching the Good News throughout Galilee. The Ethiopian continued on his journey of faith, rejoicing.

God longs for a relationship with us, and with everyone. Through the Spirit, God speaks to us about others, and to them, through us. Do we listen for the Spirit's leading on our faith journey? Are we like Philip who had the courage to approach the Ethiopian man and help him on his faith journey? Do we have a presence and manner that invites further conversation?

Do we have the courage to be like the Ethiopian and accept help? The Bible isn't always easy to understand, and this court official, knowledgeable about finances, wasn't ashamed to ask about things of the Spirit. He wasn't shy in asking to be baptised.

Baptism is our faith response to the work of Jesus in our lives... to an invitation from God to live in grace... the grace of not being ready... not being all put together,...not being perfect. The Ethiopian demonstrated dramatic faith. He was ready to respond to the opportunity the water presented.

This story invites us to risk... to risk sharing our faith with others, and to trust that the Spirit of God is longing for us to do so; and leading us. When you feel the Spirit's nudge, what is stopping you from taking a risk by sharing the hope that is within you? If the Ethiopian had the courage to dig deeper in his faith, and to ask for baptism before he had it all together, what is stopping us?

When we plan a trip, we have to remember to take along the essentials we will need in order to keep going on our journey. Our journey of faith is no different, if we are to keep the faith.

For many of us, our journey begins with Baptism, the sign and seal that God loves us and claims us as God's children. Our faith grows through prayer. Our prayer life is crucial, to seek guidance, to ask forgiveness, to be thankful, and to pray for others, throughout each day. Jesus invites us into a close relationship with him. We can talk honestly to Jesus, bringing all our needs and concerns, asking him, out of his inexhaustible abundance, to supply us with everything that we need. In our life with Jesus, we're welcomed, fed, and strengthened by him at the Table, as we share fellowship in the ongoing community life of the worshipping church.

To keep us energized for our journey, and on the right path, we must worship God and seek assistance from God's scholars. The Ethiopian was ignorant of many things, yet he read eagerly, as we must. Our roadmap on this journey is the Bible. Sometimes, scripture seems very complex and full of upside-down directives, but Jesus is the way and the truth. Reading from various versions of the Bible gives us insight, a sign from God as to where we are going. Following the Spirit's leading to do this or that, to go or to stay, we are guided in what we ought to do. We are never deprived of asking counsel, and then submitting ourselves to the leading of the Spirit. When we are willing to follow God's leading, we are keeping the faith.

A true believer is prepared to produce fruit. Whenever a person takes upon themselves the profession of a Christian, he or she claims by that outward profession to take the place, the position, the privileges and responsibilities of a believer in Christ, a branch in the vine.

On our journey of faith we meet many people. Our attitudes and approach to others make a difference. Are we, like Philip, ready to meet people of other cultures, belief systems or social or economic situations that are different from our own? We keep the faith when we recognize each person we meet as a child of God, wanting the best for them, just as God does. In today's reading from 1 John we are reminded that God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. Christ is a proof of divine love towards us. Whenever we look to him, he fully confirms the truth that God is love. Born of God we know love and are commanded to love one another. God has given us the Holy Spirit so we may have confidence in salvation, as perfect love casts out fear.

We show God's love for others in many ways on our journey of faith. Through our church we support **Presbyterians Sharing** and **Presbyterian World Service and Development**, commonly called *PWS&D*. Through our AMS we reach out with God's love by.... *(Share with listeners the work being done locally, in their Auxiliary, Presbyterial or congregation)*

We keep the faith as we continue on our journey of faith, knowing God is with us, listening to our prayers; offering grace and forgiveness through Jesus, and leading us by the Spirit.

We keep the faith by reaching out with love to God's people in large and small ways.

We keep the faith when we share our faith journey with others.

Let us keep the faith together, on this most important journey of our life.

MAY THE LORD ADD HIS BLESSING..... AMEN