

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth

Sunday, October 11th, 2026

Rev. Gerry Gallant

The God Who Meets Us on the Road

Proper 23

Acts 8:26-40

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Sing to the LORD, bless His name; tell of His salvation from day to day.

Declare His glory among the nations, His marvelous works among all the peoples.

Worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness; tremble before Him, all the earth.

Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice; for the LORD reigns!

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Almighty and everlasting God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

You alone are worthy of all honor, glory, and praise.

You created the heavens and the earth,

You rule over every nation,

and in Your mercy You seek and save the lost through Jesus Christ.

We adore You for Your holiness, wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and truth.

As You directed Philip on the desert road and opened the heart of the Ethiopian to receive Your Word, direct us now by Your Spirit.

Turn our minds from distraction,

awaken our hearts to wonder,

and enable us to worship You in spirit and in truth.

Exalt Christ among us,

grant power to the preaching of Your Word,

and make us joyful servants of Your gospel.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Call to Confession

God's Word tells us that all have sinned and fall short of His glory, and that if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. Yet it also assures us that if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. Therefore, trusting not in our own goodness but in the mercy of God revealed in Jesus Christ, let us confess our sins together.

Prayer of Confession

**Merciful God and Father,
we confess that we have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed.
We have not loved You with our whole heart,
nor loved our neighbors as ourselves.
We have trusted our own wisdom,
resisted Your clear Word,
neglected opportunities to speak of Christ,
and been slow to listen to those who seek understanding.
We have taken pride in our knowledge and forgotten that every good gift comes from You.**

**For the sake of Jesus Christ,
the Lamb who was led to the slaughter and bore the guilt of His people, forgive us.
Wash us, renew us by Your Holy Spirit,
and lead us in paths of grateful obedience,
that our lives may glorify You.
Amen.**

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news: Jesus Christ was pierced for our transgressions and raised for our justification. To all who repent and trust in Him, God promises complete forgiveness and everlasting life. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. In Him, your sins are forgiven. Go in peace and rejoice in the grace of God.

Children's Hymn #435: "All Things Bright and Beautiful" (V 1,3,4)

Refrain:
All things bright and beautiful,
all creatures great and small,
all things wise and wonderful,
in love God made them all.

Each little flower that opens,
 each little bird that sings,
 God made their glowing colours;
 God made their tiny wings. (Refrain)

The rocky mountain splendour,
 the haunting curlew's call,
 the great lakes and the prairies,
 the forests in the fall. (Refrain)

God gave us eyes to see them,
 and lips that we might tell
 how great is God almighty
 who has made all things well. (Refrain)

The Lord's Prayer

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
 Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
 Give us this day our daily bread
 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one
 For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory,
 Forever and ever, Amen.**

Hymn #457: "Now Thank We All Our God"

Now thank we all our God
 with heart and hands and voices,
 who wondrous things has done,
 in whom God's world rejoices,
 who from our mother's arms
 has blessed us on our way
 with countless gifts of love,
 and still is ours today.

Oh may this bounteous God
 through all our life be near us,
 with everjoyful hearts
 and blessed peace to cheer us,
 and keep us all with grace,
 and guide us when perplexed,

and free us from all ills
in this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God
who reigns in highest heaven,
the Father and the Son
and Spirit now be given,
the one eternal God,
whom heaven and earth adore,
for thus it was, is now
and shall be evermore.

Responsive Reading

Psalm 67:1–7

¹ May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us, *Selah*

² **that your way may be known on earth,
your saving power among all nations.**

³ Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!

⁴ **Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth. *Selah***

⁵ Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!

⁶ **The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, shall bless us.**

⁷ **God shall bless us;
let all the ends of the earth fear him!**

Anthem (Music Ministry): “A Thanksgiving Garden”

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture

Acts 8:26-40

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. ²⁷ And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸ and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹ And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot." ³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth.

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth."

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?" ³⁸ And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Sermon

This passage begins with a command that must have sounded strange to Philip. He had been preaching in Samaria, where God was blessing the work: crowds were listening, lives were changing, and there was joy in the city. Yet Acts 8 shows that the Lord who gathers crowds also seeks individuals, directs His servants by His Word, and brings searching sinners to Christ through the Scriptures.

Then the Lord told Philip to leave that busy place and go to a desert road. From a purely human point of view, that likely seemed like moving in the wrong direction. Why would he leave a fruitful field for an empty road? Why would God tell him to step away from many people for the possibility of meeting no one?

Yet the Scripture tells us simply, 'And he rose and went.'

Acts 8:26-29

²⁶Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert place. ²⁷And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over and join this chariot."

Philip did not receive the whole plan. He received a clear command from God, delivered through an angel, and he obeyed it. Although this event belongs to the remarkable advance of the Gospel recorded in Acts, it also illustrates a continuing truth: God's servants need not know every result before obeying what He has plainly revealed. We walk by faith when we trust His wisdom and take the next step Scripture requires of us.

This means that having faith does not mean that all our questions have been answered. Faith means that we trust in the One who gives us the command.

Philip's command directs him away from the crowds and toward a place where a large audience seemed unlikely. The road was quiet, exposed, and lonely. But it was not empty to God. The Lord already knew whom Philip would meet there, and the desert road formed part of His wise and gracious appointment.

In this passage, God chose to use Philip rather than the angel to explain the Scriptures. The angel directed Philip to the road, while Philip was sent to preach Christ. This pattern highlights God's ordinary means: He spreads the Gospel through His Word proclaimed by human witnesses, even though Scripture also records exceptional occasions when angels themselves delivered divine messages.

Notice also that the Lord was working on both sides of the meeting. He was directing Philip, and at the same time He was providentially preparing the Ethiopian to hear the Gospel. Before Philip heard the man's voice, God had already placed Isaiah's scroll in his hands. Before Philip asked a question, the man was already seeking understanding. Evangelism is never our attempt to force open a heart. We faithfully proclaim Christ, praying that God will give light and life through His Word.

The man Philip meets is described with care. He is Ethiopian, which in this setting points to the kingdom of Meroe, south of Egypt, in the region of present-day Sudan. He is a court official under Candace, not a personal name but a royal title. He is in charge of the

queen's treasury. He has authority, education, wealth, and responsibility. Yet none of these things can answer the deepest question of his soul.

He had traveled a great distance to worship in Jerusalem. He was returning home with an Isaiah scroll, an expensive possession in the ancient world. He was reading aloud, as people commonly did. He had religion, access, learning, and desire, but he still needed understanding. Success can fill a chariot, but it cannot fill the heart. Position may open palace doors, but it cannot open the kingdom of heaven.

Yet the Lord had not brought this searching man down the desert road merely to leave him with an unopened mystery. The same God who placed Isaiah in his hands now sent Philip to his side. The prepared reader and the obedient witness were brought together by divine appointment, and Philip began with a simple question.

Acts 8: 30-31

³⁰ So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" ³¹ And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him.

Philip hears him reading and asks, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' Luke uses a play on Greek words: *ginōskeis ha anaginōskeis*—roughly, 'Do you know what you read?'

The question is simple, respectful, and direct. Philip does not begin by showing how much he knows. He begins by listening. He meets the man at the place where God is already dealing with him.

The official answers, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' The verb translated 'guides,' *hodēgeō*, means to lead someone along a way. It can describe guiding a person who cannot find the path. The man does not need someone to replace Scripture. He needs someone to guide him through Scripture to Christ.

The official's response shows that he did not treat possession of Scripture as though it guaranteed immediate understanding. He recognized his need for guidance and welcomed Philip's help. Calvin therefore warned against proud readers who trust their own judgment while refusing the gifts God provides through faithful teachers, preaching, and careful commentary.

As Christians, we need to understand that Scripture is the final authority for faith and life. Our interpretations are not infallible, so they must continually be tested by the meaning God has given in His written Word. For this reason, the Lord gives pastors, teachers, parents, and mature believers as gifts to help us read and understand Scripture rightly.

The Reformers' doctrine of Scripture never meant that every believer should become an isolated interpreter. It meant that every teacher and every tradition must be tested against the unchanging written Word of God.

This official is a model for us. The official is not ashamed to say, 'I do not understand.'

That may be one of the hardest sentences for a capable person to speak. He managed a royal treasury, but he did not pretend to master Isaiah. A teachable heart is not a weak heart. It is a heart ready to receive grace.

And the Lord does not leave that humble confession unanswered. The man who knows that he needs a guide is already reading the passage that leads directly to Christ. His question opens the door, Isaiah supplies the text, and Philip is about to show him the Lamb who gave Himself for sinners.

Acts 8:32-35

³² Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

**"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter
and like a lamb before its shearer is silent,
so he opens not his mouth.**

³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth."

³⁴ And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" ³⁵ Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.

The passage before the Ethiopian is Isaiah 53:7–8. He asks, who is this about? Then comes one of the great sentences in Acts: 'Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus.'

Philip begins where the man is, but he does not stay there. He leads him to Jesus. The verb translated 'told him the good news' is related to *euangelizō*, to announce glad tidings. Philip does not offer vague spirituality and feel good words. He announces a Person and His saving work.

Isaiah's servant is innocent, yet he suffers. He is silent, not because He is powerless, but because He willingly gives Himself. He is denied justice, yet through injustice He accomplishes God's just purpose. The wider chapter of Isaiah says, 'He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities,' and, 'the LORD has laid on him the

iniquity of us all'. This is the doctrine of substitution. The sinless One stands in the place of sinners. The Shepherd becomes the Lamb.

The Ethiopian had likely heard of sacrifice in Jerusalem. Now Philip showed him the final sacrifice. Jesus is not an example of courage under suffering, though He is that. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Philip explains that He bore our sins in His body on the tree and He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

This is why we must preach Jesus from all Scripture. The law exposes our sin and shows our need. The prophets announce the coming King and suffering Servant. The Psalms teach us His righteous life, rejection, reign, and praise. The Gospels show His person and work. The Epistles unfold the riches of union with Him. Revelation shows the Lamb reigning forever.

The Bible is not a collection of moral hints for self-improvement. It is the unfolding story of God's glory in the salvation of sinners through Jesus Christ.

And when the good news of Jesus is truly heard, it calls for a response. Philip's explanation did not leave Christ as an idea to be considered; it brought the Ethiopian to the point of faith and obedience. As the road carried them forward, God provided the water that allowed his inward trust in Christ to be publicly confessed.

Acts 8:36-38

³⁶ **And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?"**

³⁸ **And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him.**

As the chariot moves along, they come to water. The Ethiopian asks, 'See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?' That question carries weight.

Deuteronomy 23:1 excluded a man whose reproductive organs had been mutilated from the assembly of the LORD under Israel's old-covenant order. Yet Isaiah promised a day when eunuchs who held fast to God's covenant would receive 'a name better than sons and daughters' in His house. In Christ, that promised welcome is arriving, and the Ethiopian's baptism visibly confirms that bodily condition and ethnic distance cannot exclude a believer from the people of God.

We should note carefully that verse 37, found in some later manuscripts—'I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God'—is absent from the earliest and strongest Greek witnesses and therefore appears in an ESV footnote rather than the main text. It reflects

an early Christian confession, but Christian doctrine does not depend on a doubtful verse.

The passage itself clearly shows that Philip preached Christ, the man received the good news, requested baptism, and went away rejoicing. Although Luke does not record every word Philip spoke, the Ethiopian's response shows that the Gospel called him to trust in Jesus and identify publicly with Him. Baptism does not create faith by magic or save apart from Christ; it is God's appointed sign of union with Christ, cleansing from sin, and entrance into the visible covenant community.

Christians differ over the proper subjects and mode of baptism, and this congregation includes believers from more than one denomination. We need not pretend those differences are unimportant. Yet we can confess together what this passage plainly celebrates: the good news centers on Jesus Christ, faith receives Him, and baptism publicly identifies the believer with Him and His people. Baptism points away from our achievement and toward Christ's saving work and covenant promise.

What outward circumstance can prevent a sinner from coming to Christ? Not a distant homeland. Not a complicated past. Not a low place in society, nor a high one. Not unanswered questions honestly brought to Scripture. Yet Scripture also teaches that sinners will not come unless the Father draws them and the Spirit gives life. Our only refuge is Christ, and the gospel invitation is sincere: 'Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.' We do not come because we are worthy. We come because the Lamb is worthy, and because grace enables us to come.

The baptism, however, is not the end of the story. It publicly identifies the Ethiopian with Christ, and Luke then draws attention to the joy with which he continues his journey. At the same time, the Spirit sends Philip onward. The Gospel leaves a rejoicing believer on the road to Ethiopia and carries its messenger northward through the towns toward Caesarea.

Acts 8:39-40

³⁹ And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he preached the gospel to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

After the baptism, the Spirit of the Lord carries Philip away. The Greek verb *harpazō* has the sense of seizing or taking away suddenly. The same verb appears in 1 Thessalonians 4:17, where believers are 'caught up' to meet the Lord. Luke's point here, however, is not to explain the rapture or to identify Philip with Elijah, but to emphasize God's sudden and sovereign relocation of His messenger.

So, Philip is relocated by God and appears at Azotus, the Old Testament city of Ashdod, and continues preaching northward until Caesarea.

But Luke's camera lingers for one final moment on the Ethiopian: 'he went on his way rejoicing.' His joy did not depend on keeping Philip beside him. Rudolf Gwalther, a Reformation pastor, drew a wise lesson from this: we must not cling to ministers as though Christ disappears when a minister leaves. Faithful pastors are His servants and stewards. The Spirit is the true Teacher, Christ is the true Shepherd, and the Word remains.

The man returns to the same country, the same responsibilities, and likely the same royal court. Yet Luke tells us that he continues his journey rejoicing. The road has not changed, but he has received the good news of Jesus and publicly identified himself with Christ. Grace does not necessarily remove believers from their ordinary duties. It sends them back into those duties under the lordship of Christ, sustained by His mercy and hope.

This passage calls us to three simple responses.

First, obey the Lord's clear Word even when the road seems unpromising. Philip received an extraordinary command through an angel, but the church does not need a private angelic message to know its ordinary duty. Scripture already commands us to love our neighbors, make disciples, pray for open doors, and speak of Christ.

Second, open the Scriptures with humility. Read them personally, hear them preached publicly, study them together, and receive the help God provides.

Third, begin with the text and go to Jesus. Our hope is not in our church size, our tradition, our intelligence, or our effort. Our hope is in the crucified and risen Son of God.

There may be someone near you whom the Lord is providentially bringing into contact with His Word. A co-worker may ask a question. A neighbor may mention a sorrow. A family member may wonder what a Bible verse means. Do not feel that you must know everything. Philip asked one honest question, listened to the answer, and opened the Scripture. You can do the same. Tell them who Jesus is. Tell them what He has done. Invite them to turn from sin and trust in Him.

And if you are the one searching today, take courage. The Lord who saw one man on a desert road sees you. The Lord who sent Philip has given something greater than Philip's brief presence: He has given His written Word, His church, and His promised Spirit. Hear what that Word declares: Jesus Christ, the righteous Servant, died in the place of sinners

and rose again. Turn from sin and trust in Him. Christ welcomes all who come to Him, and He says, 'Whoever comes to me I will never cast out.'

So come to the Lamb who was silent before His accusers. Come to the Servant who bore our griefs. Come to the King who rose and reigns. Bring your sin, your questions, your wounds, and your need. He does not merely point out the road; He is the Way. He does not merely explain truth; He is the Truth. He does not merely improve life; He is the Life.

May the Lord make us a church ready to rise and go, ready to listen and guide, ready to open the Scriptures, ready to preach Jesus, and ready to rejoice in every sinner whom grace brings home. As Christ calls us to be the Salt of the earth and the Light of the world, may our words and lives point others to Him, so that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven. And when our part in someone's journey is finished, may we trust them to the Shepherd who never leaves His sheep. The servant may disappear from view, but Christ remains. The road may stretch into the distance, but the believer goes on rejoicing.

Let us pray,

Sovereign Lord, our gracious Father, we thank You that Your providence governs every road and that Your gospel is mighty to save. As John Calvin prayed that we might be taught by Your Spirit and submit ourselves wholly to Your truth, so grant us humble and teachable hearts. Keep us from trusting our own wisdom. Make us ready to obey Your clear Word, ready to listen to those who seek understanding, and ready to open the Scriptures and proclaim Jesus Christ. Fix our faith upon the Lamb who bore our sins, the risen King who reigns, and the Shepherd who never leaves His people. Send us into our ordinary callings with holy courage and joyful hope. May those who hear the good news repent, believe, receive the sign of Your covenant grace, and go on their way rejoicing. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Based upon the prayers of John Calvin

Invitation to Offering

As an act of worship and gratitude to God, you are invited to place your offering in the offering box at the back of the church, as you leave today. We now offer our thanks to the Lord for His abundant grace and faithful provision through song and prayer.

Offering Prayer

Offering Hymn #830: “Praise God From Whom All Blessings Flow”

Praise God from Whom all blessings flow,
 Praise Him, all creatures here below:
 Praise Him above, ye heavenly host;
 Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

Closing Hymn #803: “Come, Ye Thankful People, Come” (V 1,2,3)

Come, ye thankful people, come,
 Raise the song of harvest home!
 All is safely gathered in
 Ere the winter storms begin.
 God, our Maker, doth provide
 For our wants to be supplied.
 Come to God's own temple, come,
 Raise the song of harvest home.

All the world is God's own field,
 Fruit unto God's praise to yield;
 Wheat and tares together sown,
 Unto joy or sorrow grown.
 First the blade, and then the ear,
 Then the full corn shall appear;
 Lord of harvest, grant that we
 Wholesome grain and pure may be.

For the Lord our God shall come,
 And shall take the harvest home;
 From the field shall in that day
 All offences purge away;
 Give His angels charge at last
 In the fire the tares to cast;
 But the fruitful ears to store
 In God's storehouse evermore.

Pastoral Prayer

Gracious Father, we come before You through Jesus Christ, our great High Priest, thankful that You hear the prayers of Your people. Build Your church upon the truth of Your Word. Give pastors and teachers faithfulness, missionaries courage, elders wisdom, and every believer readiness to speak the good news of Christ. Open doors for the gospel in our homes, workplaces, communities, and among the nations. Draw sinners to Your Son, strengthen those who are young in faith, restore those who have wandered, and comfort those who are troubled in conscience.

We pray for those who are sick, grieving, lonely, burdened, or afraid. Be near to them in mercy. Provide for those who lack work, food, shelter, friendship, or hope. Uphold caregivers, guide physicians and all who serve the suffering, and teach us to bear one another's burdens. Grant wisdom and justice to those in authority, restrain evil, protect the vulnerable, and give peace wherever there is conflict.

Make us like Philip: attentive to Your leading, obedient to Your command, humble before Scripture, and eager to make Christ known. Keep us from pride in our knowledge or confidence in our own strength. By Your Spirit, make us a congregation that welcomes the searching, teaches the truth patiently, and rejoices whenever Your grace brings a sinner home.

We also thank You for the food and fellowship that will follow this service. Bless the hands that prepared the meal, bless the food to the nourishment of our bodies, and bless our conversation to the strengthening of love and unity among us. May our table fellowship reflect the welcome we have received in Christ and bring honor to Your name.

We ask all these things in the name of Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray and who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever. **Amen.**

Benediction

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope. And may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Go in peace, and go on your way rejoicing. **Amen.**