Called to Break Down Barriers

Summer Quarter: God’s Urgent Call
Unit 3: Calls in the New Testament

Sunday School Lesson for the week of August 13, 2017
By Rev. Earnestine W. Campbell

Lesson Scripture: Acts 8:26-39
Background Scripture: Acts 8

Key Verse: Starting with that passage, Philip proclaimed the good news about Jesus to him. (Acts 8:35)

Purpose: To grasp the importance of and commit to ministering to the marginalized

Hearing the Word

The “Adult Bible Studies” writer begins this week’s lesson with a brief overview of last week’s lesson in the Book of Acts. The writer emphasizes Luke’s focus in Acts as the spread of the Christian faith to all. The lesson will also focus on the religious movement, the Holy Spirit, and Philip’s developing call to service and leadership.

Background lesson

Acts 8 – Outline

- Acts 8:1-3: Saul Persecutes the Church
- Acts 8:4-25: Philip Preaches in Samaria
- Acts 8:26-40: Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

Bible lesson

Acts 8:26-39

The writer examines the text author’s account of spreading Christianity and the Holy Spirit to all people, to include the continent of Africa. We see this development in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. Verse 8 states, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” The writer uses the scripture to convey the conversion of the risen Jesus Christ, the accession, and the power of this expansion movement. Philip, one of the seven disciples, called for service of food and the care of the marginalized (Acts 6), evolved from the administrative to the evangelistic ministries of healing the sick, casting out demons, and preaching the way of Christianity (Acts 8:1, 4-6). We see this conversion of Philip in Verse 26, “An angel from the Lord spoke to
Philip, “…take the road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a desert road.) The writer uses this scripture to show that the Holy Spirit uses a deserted or desert road that leads to unexpected ministry opportunities. This type of road signifies that Philip was taking an inconvenient route and a road not chosen of his volition. Here’s how the writer describes Philip’s journey:

Robert Frost’s 1920 poem “The Road Not Taken,” which ends, *I shall be telling this with a sigh Somewhere ages and ages hence; Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference.*

The writer states, “Life gives us the choice between two roads. One road leads to the ways of the world; one road leads to the kingdom of God. The latter route is the road less traveled.” Philip chose to take the road less traveled, and it made all the difference. He trusted God; he went where God asked him to go and did what God asked him to do. Moreover, because he was willing to take this road less traveled, God used him to make a major impact on the world.

Occasionally, we face situations and conditions that are uncharted territories and are hesitant to travel that road. We see by this lesson that the Holy Spirit may be nudging us to move out of our comfort zone and move to uncharted territories to do the Holy Spirit’s will and, vice versa, its will for us. Even when we submit to the Holy Spirit and diverge from our paths, our desires sometimes tell us to do a U-turn. It’s like when traveling, the GPS (Global Positioning System) tries to reroute us when we stray from its path and to turn us around to the originally planned course. The Holy Spirit instructs us to do its will and not our own; we just have to stay the course even when others or our GPS tell us to do otherwise.

Reflection Question

- When has the Holy Spirit instructed you to uncharted territories in ministry or your personal life? Did you travel the road less taken or declined and eventually wondered “what if?”

The scripture tells us that Philip did obey the Holy Spirit and went a route not planned. The writer states, “Philip was willing to take risks and make mistakes because he put his trust in God. He did not worry about what others thought; he was only concerned about pleasing God.” We see that Philip did not argue with the Holy Spirit, but was obedient (verse 27).

Just as important to Philip’s call to action and his obedience, the Holy Spirit’s instructing and Philip obeying didn’t end there. The story continues with the Ethiopian man reading the Book of Isaiah in his carriage. He is ready for a relationship with God. In verse 29, the Spirit speaks to Philip, “…Approach this carriage and stay with it.” Philip obeys the
Spirit. He approaches the man with a question about his understanding of what he was reading, and the Eunuch gives an invitation to Philip to help him understand. This leads to Philip’s opportunity to proclaim the good news about Jesus (verses 30-35).

The concluding verses 36-38 state, “As they went down the road, they came to some water. The eunuch said, “Look! Water! What would keep me from being baptized?” He ordered that the carriage be halted. Both Philip and the eunuch went down to the water, where Philip baptized him.” The “road” in this lesson seems to be a symbolic pathway for spreading the good news and the salvific acceptance of the Christian faith. We see that when we follow the Holy Spirit’s instructions, ministries and evangelistic efforts are successful. Lives are transformed, and God is glorified.

The writer asks:

Who in your community do you think might be the most receptive to the gospel message? How do you believe that we could most effectively reach them for Christ?

In conclusion

Let us draw closer to God so that we may be able to hear and accept the call of the Holy Spirit. We see through the call of the prophets in the Old Testament, and now the disciples in the New Testament, that they both answered by faith and obedience to God. They are models for us today that we are called to spread the good news and lead others to Christ.

Closing prayer

Father, we see that through your Word that the call to do ministry may feel like a risk, often difficult and unfamiliar territory. May we not be fearful or anxious when things don’t go as planned. Let us remember Proverbs 3:5-6, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” (NKJV) Amen.

Rev. Earnestine W. Campbell serves as the Associate Director for Connectional Ministries. Contact her at earnestine@sgaumc.com.

The “Adult Bible Studies, Summer 2017, God’s Urgent Call” is used for the content of this lesson.