

Reflections for 2nd May 2021

5th Sunday of Easter

To the ends of the earth

There is a pattern that is set out at the beginning of the book of Acts, in the words of Jesus to his disciples before his Ascension:

... and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1. 8)

and we see an example of that happening in our reading from Acts this week. It tells us that a disciple called Philip was prompted by God to go out on the desert road running south from Jerusalem towards Egypt, where he met and baptised a man who was the least likely of converts.

This man had been to visit Jerusalem, and he was reading the scriptures as he travelled. There are several reasons why he would have seemed an unlikely convert to join the followers of Jesus:

He was a Gentile, at a point where most believers were still Jewish.

He was a strange, exotic-looking foreigner from Ethiopia.

And he was a eunuch, and so barred from joining the worship in the Temple. So there were plenty of reasons why this man might have been excluded from the Jewish tradition, and so from the gathering of the followers of Jesus. But Philip was ready to spend time with him, to teach and guide him, and then to baptise him and welcome him into the family of the church.

So the story of Philip and the Ethiopian is included at this vital moment, as part of the pattern, the circles rippling out from Jerusalem, as the good news about Jesus is shared. This story reminds and challenges us to be as open-hearted as Philip was, because the good news is for all the world, and for every kind of person, from where we are 'to the ends of the earth' – a bit like dropping a pebble into a pool, and watching the circles rippling out, the waves spreading further and further.

Revd John Waller

Almighty God,
who called your church to witness
that in Christ you were reconciling the world to yourself:
help us so to proclaim the good news of your love,
that all who hear it may be reconciled to you
through him who died for us and rose again,
Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Bible readings: Acts 8. 26-40; 1 John 4. 7-12; John 15. 1-8

Story: Philip and the Ethiopian (based on Acts chapter 8)