

You've heard this one before but it's worth repeating in light of today's message: A woman went to see a divorce lawyer. She told him frantically, "I must have a divorce from my husband immediately!" The lawyer asked, "Do you have any grounds?" "Yes, about five acres." "I mean, do you have a grudge?" the lawyer questioned. "No just a carport." Then the lawyer asked, "Does he beat you up?" "Of course not," the woman replied, "I get up every morning before he does." Exasperated, the attorney demanded, "Madam, why do you want a divorce from your husband?" "Because it's impossible to communicate with the man!"

Question: How well do you hear God's voice? This text is a call to get the wax out of our ears, perhaps to get a hearing aid even, cup our hand over our ears at least, and listen intently to what God is saying! (*Read Acts 8:26-39*)

It's a story full of miracles. First, God spoke to Philip and told him where to go. Next, there happens to be a pool by the side of a dry, desert road exactly in the place they needed it. Third, Philip didn't get to rejoice with the new Christian because he was "Spirited" away to another town immediately after the baptism. How about the miracle of Philip being able to run fast enough to catch up to a chariot pulled by an animal? Or how did a copy of the Hebrew scripture get in the hands of the Ethiopian and at such a time as there was the right person available to help him understand it?

We know this particular Ethiopian was important and influential. He was an official, in fact the chief treasurer for the queen of the country of Ethiopia (which was an affluent country at that time). We also know that he was hungry – hungry to learn about God. He had questions. And when God unites a listening ear (Philip's) and a hungry heart (the official's) God does even more miracles!

God's voice is heard at least three times in this passage. In verse 26, the angel tells the disciple Philip generally where to go. In verse 29, the Spirit says more specifically to Philip what person to speak to. And in verses 32 and 35, the Holy Spirit is speaking through the scripture of Isaiah, wooing the Ethiopian official to faith in Christ.

How well do you listen to God's voice? Do you hear His voice speaking to you through the bible? Can you hear God's nudges when you pray? Are you in tune with Holy Spirit enough to know when He is impressing something upon you – to stop, to go, to turn, to speak up? Do you hear God's voice in the godly advice of brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you obedient to these directions from God?

What gives us dull ears? Why don't we hear our Father as we should? Is it sinful wax or congenital hard of hearing? Or is it a combination of many things?

Dr. Jesus is looking in your ears as you hear my words right now and asking about what may be causing your ear problems:
Is it because you're too busy and don't take time to listen to His Love Letter?
Is it because you are afraid you won't hear Him right?
Is it because you don't really know God, so how can you know His voice?
Is it rebellion? You hear God, but you don't want to follow through?
Are all the other voices in the world drowning out the voice of the One who loves you most?

On this World Wide Communion Sunday and in light of our scripture (and Ruby's baptism) this morning, God is speaking to each of us about listening to Him and letting Him match us up with those who have hungry, God-starved hearts. When we listen to God's gentle urgings, we will find that there are many Ethiopian officials in the world who know *about* Jesus, but don't *know* Jesus. How can they unless someone like us explains to them? God can and will use you right where you are. God can and will use you to help tell the world about Jesus.

In 1962 in the seventh game of the World Series, the San Francisco Giants had a man on second base, which put him near New York Yankee second baseman Bobby Richardson. When the Yankees decided to change pitchers, Richardson, who was a Christian, saw a unique opportunity. While the new pitcher was warming up, Richardson walked over to the base runner on second and asked him if he knew Jesus as Saviour. When the runner reached the dugout later, he asked Giants teammate Felipe Alou, who was also a Christian, what was going on. "Even in the seventh game of the World Series," he said to Felipe, "you people are still talking about Jesus." Like the disciple Philip, Bobby Richardson heard God's voice and responded.

An incident happened at the University of Southern California a few years ago that changed one teacher. The man was a professor of philosophy who was a deeply committed atheist. His primary goal for one required class was to spend the entire semester attempting to prove that God couldn't exist. His students were always afraid to argue with him because of his irreproachable position. For twenty years he taught this position to his class and no one had ever had the courage to go against him. Some had argued in class at times, but no one had ever really challenged the professor. Nobody would speak against the man's belief because of the man's reputation.

At the end of every semester, on the last day of classes, the professor would say to his class of 300 students, "If there is anyone here who stills believes in God, stand up!" In twenty years, no one had dared to stand. They knew what their teacher was going to do next. He would continue, "Because anyone who does believe in God is a fool. If God existed, He could stop this piece of chalk from breaking when it hit the ground. Such a simple task to prove that there is God and yet He can't do it." And every year, the instructor would drop the chalk onto the tile floor of the classroom and it would shatter into a hundred pieces. The

students could do nothing but stare. Most of the students were convinced by the end of the semester that God couldn't exist. Certainly a number of Christians had slipped through, but for twenty years they had been too timid to stand up.

A few years ago, there was a freshman who happened to get enrolled in the class. He was a committed Christian and had heard stories about this professor. He had to take the class because it was part of the required course list he needed for his major. And he was afraid. But for three months that semester, the young man prayed every morning that he would have the courage to stand up no matter what the professor said or what the class thought.

Finally the end of semester came. The professor said, "If there is anyone here who still believes in God, stand up!" The instructor and the 300 students looked at the young Christian as he stood up at the back of the classroom. The professor shouted, "You fool! If God existed, He could keep this piece of chalk from breaking when it the ground!" He proceeded to drop the chalk, but as he did, it slipped out of his fingers, off his shirt cuff, onto the pleats of his pants, rolled down his leg and off his shoe. As it hit the ground it simply rolled away, unbroken. The professor's jaw dropped as he stared at the chalk. He looked up at the young man and then ran out of the lecture hall. The young man who stood up, proceeded to the front of the room and shared his faith in Jesus for the next half hour. All the students stayed and listened as he told of God's love for them and of His power through Christ! True story.

It is very often difficult to learn how to share our faith, especially in a multi-cultural, pluralistic world. But think about how you got here? What made you go to church for the first time? I don't mean Bethany, just church in general. Some come out of pure curiosity or intense desperation, but most people end up in a church because someone invited them to hear the story of faith through the body of Christ.

The story of Philip and the Ethiopian gives us a model of how to share our faith so that others can know God personally.

1. Listen to what God says and act on that: when God nudges you to speak to someone or go somewhere, do it! The angel lead Philip away from a place that had all kinds of opportunities to meet people, to a seemingly inappropriate place—a deserted road. It was there that Philip found a heart ready to be fed. When God says, "Go," go!
2. Ask thought-provoking questions: If you don't know what else to say, ask a meaningful spiritual question or play off something the person just said to ask a spiritual question related to it. All Philip asked was what God gave him, "Do you understand what you're reading?" I can guarantee that most people are more ready to talk about spiritual things than they are ready to initiate the topic. Never presuppose a negative response in speaking to people about faith.

3. Listen to their questions and then answer them. You don't have to have all the answers. Just listen and tell them about what the bible says. "Then Philip began at this place in the scripture and explained the good news about Jesus.
4. Don't make it harder than it is. Don't try to wax eloquent or make big theological pronouncements in order to convert people. KISS (Keep It Simple Sweetheart) is always a good rule. It is always the Holy Spirit's job to convict people's hearts.
5. Keep at it. Philip had the privilege of baptizing a new Christian, but he didn't get to see the Ethiopian's spiritual growth. That's okay, Philip just kept on going where God lead him and doing what God called him to do. Everyday ask God to help you find your own Ethiopian official.

Each morning as you put in your spiritual hearing aid, be sure you turn it up loud enough to hear God say to you what He said to His Son at His baptism: "You are my beloved child. I love you and I am well pleased with you!"