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## *Proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ!*

**A sermon by the Rev. Salmoon Bashir  
Choral Eucharist for the Feast of St. Philip**

In the name of the God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? These are the words we commit to, through our own baptismal covenant at least few times a year. So, on this feast day of St. Philip the Deacon, let me ask you all a question? How can we proclaim the Good News? How can we live out our baptismal covenant by word and by example?

Some of you know that previously I worked for an organization, called Fearless Dialogues. The work of Fearless Dialogues is to create unique spaces for people to have hard, heartfelt conversations. The three pillars of their work are "SEE. HEAR. CHANGE." SEE. HEAR. CHANGE!

To see people means to see them as fully humans, as whole persons, as image of God, whoever they are and wherever they are coming from – people who are often invisible in the eyes of the world. Hearing their stories means to know about their lives, to share into their stories of joy and love, the stories of grief and sadness. These first two pillars of seeing and hearing brings sustainable change in people's lives.

Seeing persons as beloved children of God and hearing their stories creates a unique relationship, the kind of relationship we just read about in the book of Acts. When our patron saint, our very own St. Philip the Deacon and evangelist saw the Ethiopian Eunuch and heard what he had to share, brought both of them closer to one another and opened doors for offering the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Now, St. Philip was one of the seven deacons, first appointed by the Apostles in Jerusalem. Deacons were appointed to be catalysts among the people of God, equipping the baptized people for service, in order that the community becomes a living body of Christ. St. Philip was one of the catalytic agents in the early church, who was serving the community in the early church. However, when Saul initiated an aggressive persecution of the church in Jerusalem, all Apostles and disciples were scattered throughout the region. St. Philip went North to the city of Samaria where he shared the good news of Jesus the Messiah. After spreading the Gospel there, the Holy Spirit called St. Philip to head to Gaza to meet an Ethiopian Eunuch.

Now about the eunuchs, historically they generally were captured, and castrated in their young age, particularly if they had to serve female rulers and, in this case, the Ethiopian eunuch was serving as counselor and treasurer for the queen of Ethiopia. Even though he had authority as the counselor and treasurer of the Queen, still according to purity codes in Leviticus, in many cases, he was not allowed to enter the temple in Jerusalem. He was also considered an outsider for being a foreigner in addition to being a eunuch.

The fact that many eunuchs despite their social stigmatization held important offices, were literate and had access to material wealth made them more socially ambiguous. Trusted by high official yet treated with suspicion, prosperous yet ostracized, the powerful whose power ironically came only through his humiliation. It is this kind of person whom St. Philip was called by the Spirit to approach when the eunuch was coming back from the pilgrimage to the Holy City. A social outcast, living on a liminal edge in terms of religious identification and his socioeconomic status.

But through the power of seeing the eunuch as a whole person and hearing what he had to share, St. Philip was able to offer the good news of Jesus Christ to him, to share with him who the Messiah was – the one who became a humble servant, like a lamb silent before its shearer. In His humiliation, justice was denied to Him

and through His suffering, death, and resurrection, He became the savior for the whole of humanity.

St. Philip, although he was persecuted, heard, and followed the voice of the Spirit and shared the love of Jesus with the Ethiopian eunuch. And friends, you know what happens when we truly embrace people and share the love of Jesus with them, you know what happens next... People change, lives change, when we tell others the story of Jesus boldly through our words and through our actions, people accept the good news, the life-giving Gospel! People change, lives change.

Some historians even trace the foundation of church in Ethiopia to this eunuch who was seen, heard and then baptized by St. Phillip. And when he went back home, he spread the good news to all who came in contact with him. This is the power of seeing, hearing and then sharing the good news with others.

Coming back to the question that I asked at the beginning, how can we proclaim the Good News? How can we live out our own baptismal covenant by word and by example?

Friends, on this feast day of St. Philip the Deacon and evangelist, my prayer is that we all see those who are being left out the way St. Philip saw this Ethiopian eunuch, may we hear their stories the way St. Philip heard him, may we bring people to the proximity of creating relationships and through that may we share the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, the good news of Jesus and bring them all, everyone, to this loving and life giving God.

So my question is: Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ? We will! Amen!