

Isaiah 53: 1-12
Acts 8: 26-40
June 16, 2013
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church

This morning we celebrate the sacrament of baptism of an adult. When we baptize infants we and the parents profess faith in Jesus Christ on behalf of the child. But in the case of an adult, she comes of her own choice to profess her faith and to receive the water of the forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life.

In coming to this congregation Kathryn has not made it easy for herself. She found us on the internet. She travels to Guilderland from Clifton Park. She has become a regular part of the worshiping community, singing in the choir and playing in the guitar choir. As MJ and I have spent time with her, we have been impressed with her sincere desire to live the life of a Christian and for her baptism to mark an intentional beginning of her spiritual journey.

Thus this moment brings great joy. It also brings great responsibility.

The Ethiopian official who Phillip encounters is standing on the threshold of faith. When we meet him he is returning from Jerusalem. He has traveled a long distance over difficult and dangerous roads to worship the God of Israel. He would be called in the language of the time a God-fearer: a gentile who is drawn to the God Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is earnestly reading the Hebrew scriptures and trying to make sense of what they say. Yet he has reached a stand still. When Phillip approaches his chariot he is reading the passage we heard from the prophet Isaiah. When Phillip

asks him if he understands what he is reading, we can hear the frustration in the official's voice: "How can I unless someone guides me?"

What happens next is a small detail but very important. The official invites Phillip into his chariot. The earliest commentators on this episode make much of the fact that the rich and powerful official is not ashamed to invite an obviously poor stranger into his chariot. As far as the official is concerned, this poor man is richer than he is for he possesses wisdom that the official, for all his wealth and power cannot acquire on his own. We are meant to notice the depth of desire of this man for understanding that he is willing to be taught by a lowly stranger. We are meant to be cut to the quick for all the times we have been so complacent in our own faith that we can dismiss the testimony of someone who we consider to be beneath us. We are meant to ask ourselves, "How hungry am I to understand the Gospel? How urgently do I want to grow in faith? Enough to learn from anyone?"

By the same token, are we sufficiently convinced of the truth of the Gospel that we are not intimidated by the apparently rich and powerful? Is our desire to share God's love such that we see the human being who may drive a fancy car or live in a big house, but who doubts that God could love him or her? How many people are trapped by their affluence? How many people have it all according to the standards of the world and yet are isolated and empty? How many people believe that the poor are loved by God but the rich are condemned? Clearly Phillip saw not a rich and powerful man, but another child of God in need of the love that only God can give. And it is this clarity of vision as much as his ability to interpret the scripture which opens the Ethiopian official to the

Good news. It is this human to human contact that is not impressed with a person's station in life along with the willingness to teach the meaning of the word of God which prompts this man to exclaim, "What is to prevent me from being baptized?"

Kathryn comes to us having traveled, as we all do, a long and sometimes difficult road. The amazing fact is that this road has led her to confess her faith in Jesus as her Lord and Savior. She comes to him to receive the sacrament of baptism. By accepting this baptism she intentionally identifies her life with the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus. She seeks from now on to be guided by his presence in the person of the Holy Spirit. How will she do this if there is no one to guide her?

So many people take this step and the world whisks them away because there was no one to come along side them and help them to become rooted in a community of faith. Will you be her guides? Will you seek to strength her ties to the Lord in whom she professes her trust? You will be asked this question in a few minutes so think about this.

Kathryn, as we move to celebrate your baptism, I want you to know that we care about you and rejoice that the Lord has led you to this moment. Yet we are human beings like you seeking the same love bestowed upon you this day. We are far from perfect. And so we ask you to help us to help you. We ask that you have the confidence to share your faith with us. We urge you always to seek the God who alone is able to supply our deepest needs and who has revealed himself so personally through his son, Jesus. Amen.