

Sermon Acts 8 26 40 5th Sunday of Easter series B

Sermon: 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Text: Acts 8:26-40 (v.35)

Theme: The Good News about Jesus is for all!

Goal: There are no human boundaries for the Gospel: God wants to reach all!

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Xenophobia is in the daily News. The recent street conflicts in Jo'burg show how difficult it is for some people to accept foreigners in our country. I know that it is not just a question of racism, but there are lots of economic issues behind the violence against the foreigners living in South Africa. But this is not an excuse to practice violence against the foreigners, no matter if they are refugees or just looking for a better way of life. – Even Pastor Inock was scared and felt himself very insecure in Joe Slovo last week.

A “soft” kind of xenophobia is shown when we as Christians reject in our heart people who don't speak our language; who have different skin than us; or different culture, educational level, age, gender...

Our text shows how the Great Commission of Jesus began to become true: “Make disciples of **all** nations...” because Jesus died for all and not just for some of us; and He wants to save all!

I – The background and the characters

The Ethiopian eunuch was someone totally “out of the box” for the Jewish religion. He was a foreigner from North Africa, his skin was different, and, most of all, he was regarded as ritually impure because of his condition as a eunuch, a castrated man. He would never been allowed to enter the Temple in Jerusalem; he could stay and worship only at the Gentile's Court of the Temple, the most outside walls of the Temple. Even so, he was a God-fearing man who

took the long journey from his country to Jerusalem to worship the God of Israel; and he probably bought a copy of the Book of Isaiah, which he was reading on his way back home.

Philip was not one of the Twelve Apostles; but he was one of the seven Deacons elected according to Acts 6, together with Stephen and others. Philip, guided by the Holy Spirit, was sent to help the Ethiopian on his search for the truth. – You have to notice that this happened on the way from Jerusalem to Gaza, one of the currently strongest areas of xenophobia conflict between Jews and Palestinians. – Philip had a heart for foreigners. He had preached to the Samaritans (Acts 8:4-8) and after his encounter with the Ethiopian man Philip went to Caesarea, the Roman's centre in Israel. – He didn't question the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but went and shared the Good News with the Ethiopian eunuch, in spite of all racial, religious and other differences between him and the foreigner.

## II – The message

The Ethiopian was reading the Book of Isaiah chapter 53, a prophecy about the suffering Messiah. He was reading but couldn't understand it; as in his own words: “How can I understand what I am reading unless someone explains it to me?”

This is one of the pastor's tasks: To explain the Scriptures to his people. I can feel at the Bible Study Group, at the Confirmation Class, or in home visits that people read but sometimes they cannot understand what the text is speaking about. It is necessary to have a broader understanding of the entire Bible to link one text to the other, so that they all make sense. I don't know everything in the Bible either, so I need to study constantly and prepare myself for the Service and for the Bible Study. But the Theological Course I did, many Seminars and meetings I attended, added to the several years

of experience, have given me reasonable knowledge of the Bible truths; but above all have given me faith in Jesus and love to share His Good News with all: In Brazil, Kenya, South Africa and Mozambique, so far!

This is what Philip did with the traveller from Ethiopia. He sat down in the chariot and explained him the text. “Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.” - The Bible is not a book just to be read and to be researched. It has a message to be believed! A message about Jesus, the Son of God, who came to take away our sins and to grant us forgiveness and life! Someone can read the Bible a thousand times; but if he doesn't find Jesus, his personal Saviour in it, it will not help him. Some people follow the precepts of the Bible, like a pattern for their life; but they don't follow Jesus by faith. Sorry, they are missing the essence of the Bible. Without Jesus, the Bible is just a book like many others. But with Jesus, the Bible is the Book of Life! Like Luther said: The Bible is the manger which holds Jesus. Without Jesus, it is only a manger full of straw.

Through the good testimony of Philip, the Ethiopian believed in Jesus and asked to be baptized. And when they found water, they went down into the water and Philip baptized him. Rejoicing, the Ethiopian went back to his country with a new heart filled with the Holy Spirit and believed in Jesus. – It seems that this was the very beginning of the Christian Church in Ethiopia, one of the first countries to receive the Good News through that high official of the queen's court.

Conclusion: There are two main manners to do God's mission: The first one is just serving God inside the church and waiting for people to come. This was the main strategy of the Jewish people. Through their way of life based on the Ten Commandments and through their

strong fellowship around the synagogues and the Temple, many foreigners were attracted to their faith and came, believing in the God of Israel. – This is why the Ethiopian went from his country to Jerusalem.

The second way is to go outside the church and to share the Good News with others, as the resurrected Jesus commanded: “Go into all the world and preach the Good News to all nations” (Mark 16:15). Thanks to people like Philip and many others, that they didn’t stay in Jerusalem, but went out to the entire world, that we were also reached by the Gospel and could experience God’s grace.

What kind of mission are we doing as St. Thomas? I think we are much more like the Jews, waiting for people to come to our church instead of going and sharing with them the Good News about Jesus. But even so God has been gracious and has brought many to our fellowship. What is our task now? To always welcome them and not to put barriers because of their differences. God loves everyone and He sends us like He sent Philip to share the Good News to all people on their way.

As baptized people of God we go forward on our way, like the Ethiopian, rejoicing for what God has done for us through Jesus Christ. Our joy and our behaviour as children of God are lightening the way for others. We just celebrate Easter, the Feast of Victory; and in three weeks we will celebrate Pentecost, the Feast of the Holy Spirit, who calls us and everybody by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts, sanctifies and keeps us in the true faith, gathering us into the Christian Church. What about the foreigners who are around us? Let us look to them through the eyes of God, who loves them as well and wants to gather them into His Holy Church. Amen.