



Weekly Update

April 25-May 1

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Acts 8:26-39 The Holy Spirit chases down an Ethiopian eunuch through Philip

As a child, my only knowledge of Ethiopia came from television ads from humanitarian groups trying to raise money to feed the hungry. There was a great famine in Ethiopia in the early 1980s, and I remember Live Aid and the song “We Are the World,” as raising money for Ethiopia became a huge business. This image of Ethiopia though, warped not only my understanding of that country, but of Africa as a whole. For decades, Americans have largely thought of Africa as the “Dark Continent” devoid of culture, technology, or advanced civilization.

This warped view of the continent has attributed to racist attitudes, white supremacy, and discrimination. We at Two Rivers know the love and generosity of African brothers and sisters. Though none of our members are from Ethiopia, they come from beautiful and rich countries like Burundi, Rwanda, and Democratic Republic of Congo. All of these nations have deep cultural influence on the world. They have suffered much through colonialism and many of the current instabilities have roots in colonial systems of oppression.

Many consider Christianity to be a European religion. Through the efforts of Paul, Christ was proclaimed in Turkey, Greece, and eventually Italy itself. The conversion of Constantine in 337 is a well-known milestone in European and Christian history. For better or worse, Rome became a Christian Empire upon Constantine’s death, and the Church and the power of the State were forever merged.

Most do not realize however, that in Africa—and modern day Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Yemen, there was a Kingdom known as Aksum. This Kingdom lasted 900 years (from 80-960). In 330, King Ezana of Aksum made Christianity the religion of his empire. There is reason to believe that Christianity existed in the region long before this edict. In fact Irenaeus, one of the early Church Fathers, wrote in 180 that the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts went on to become a great evangelist in Africa.

On the surface, the passage we share today feels like the story of Philip and an Ethiopian eunuch. This is a story of two men finding each other on the road and having an incredible exchange of ideas which ends in baptism and joy.

This however, misses a third very important character in the story: the Holy Spirit. The Book of Acts is the Good News of the Holy Spirit. It is not the Good News of the Church, or the Good News of Peter or Paul. It is the story of how The Holy Spirit took God’s Kingdom from Jerusalem, through Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the Earth. This story is one example of how the Holy Spirit reached the ends of the earth—Ethiopia, which many at the time considered to be the southernmost edge of the world.

The story begins and ends on the initiative of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit that leads Philip to this wilderness road. It is the Spirit that tells him to chase down this stranger in a chariot. Finally, it is the Spirit that takes Philip away and leaves the eunuch rejoicing.

This is a story of the Holy Spirit chasing down a stranger—a black, sexually unclean stranger. This man is gender non-conforming and he is from a foreign, strange land (from Philip’s perspective) but still, the Holy Spirit pursues him. Like Psalm 23 says “surely goodness and steadfast love will pursue me...” The Holy Spirit pursued this man, and he went away rejoicing.

May we be open to the Spirit, and allow her to chase us down with faithful love. May we be open to the Spirit, spurring us on to chase down all of God’s people, regardless of race, ethnicity, culture, language, nationality, gender, or sexual orientation. Maybe then, the whole world can have much rejoicing.



Illustration from the [Menologion of Basil II](#) of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, found at [wikimedia commons](#).

TWO RIVERS CHURCH WEEKLY UPDATE

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WEEKLY GPS

GROW

PRAY

STUDY

SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR THE WEEK: Acts 8:35

Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.

DAILY BIBLE READINGS

Monday	Acts 9:1-19	The Conversion of Saul
Tuesday	Acts 9:20-31	Saul in Damascus and Jerusalem
Wednesday	Acts 9:36-43	Paul and Tabitha
Thursday	Acts 10:34-48	Gentiles Hear the Good News
Friday	Acts 11:19-30	The Church in Antioch
Saturday	Acts 12:6-19	Peter Delivered from Prison

CARING CONVERSATIONS or REFLECTIONS

- ◇ **Thinking About This Week's Story:** In this week's reading, the eunuch from Ethiopia was excited to learn something new about God. What was something that you learned today ?
- ◇ **Getting Ready For Next Week's Story:** In next week's Scripture, the early church leaders argued. What was an argument or disagreement you had today? How did you resolve it?

PRAYER OF THE WEEK

Creator of all, open our hearts and minds to learn new things. Give us the courage and openness to be willing to change as you lead us—all to your glory! Amen

SERMON SERIES: "Witness"

May 2	Council at Jerusalem	Acts 15:1-18
May 9	Living By Faith	Gal. 1:13-17, 2:11-21
May 16	One in Christ	Gal. 3: 1-9, 23-29



School Staff Appreciation Week.

Two Rivers Church will continue our relationship with Rock Island Academy next week during Staff Appreciation Week.

The teachers and staff at Rock Island Academy will be treated with breakfast and lunch on different days of the week. On Tuesday, May 4, Two Rivers will provide a lunch of Hungry Hobo sandwiches, chips, and cookies.

This is a part of an ongoing connection between Two Rivers and Rock Island Academy. We provided a lunch for the staff back in October, snacks for them on two occasions during the school year, and 400 masks for their students.

We hope that next year we can foster some volunteer opportunities as well.