

Come, Spirit of Christ – show us Your way, teach us Your truth, fill us with Your life. Amen.

Imagine driving up Route 301 and hearing a voice in your head say:

"I want you to go to the Rosewick Center parking lot."

And when you get there the voice says, "You will see a man in a green Lexus SUV.

Go up to the window and ask him what he's reading."

You go up to the window and the guy is really happy to see you –

he's reading the Bible. You ask him, "Do you understand what you're reading?"

He says, "I don't have a clue – it's about God, that's all I know."

So you get in the passenger side and begin to explain to him –

oh wait, none of us would ever get in a car with a stranger.

We do need to update this story, don't we?

Much has changed between our world and the world of the first Christians.

We believers don't have quite the fervor of those apostles

who'd just experienced Pentecost, do we?

Or is it that we don't have the fervor of those apostles who've just gotten a

taste of persecution, the first martyrdom of one of their brothers?

It didn't put them off – it made them more determined to spread the Good News.

That's why Philip was on that road – they'd all fled Jerusalem and were taking the

message elsewhere, speaking about Jesus everywhere they got an opening.

Maybe our faith is just a little more domesticated, cozy, comfortable.

But, you might say, we're not being given dictation by the Holy Spirit, are we?

Being Google-Mapped by the Holy Ghost — "Go east on 257 for 8.2 miles;

when you get to the intersection with three fig trees, look for a chariot..."

When did you last get specific directions from God?

And how many of us, if someone were reading a passage from Isaiah,

would know how to help her interpret it? How well do we know our Bible?

And here's one more: how many of us care enough about the spiritual lives of

other people, to take the time to tell them what we believe about

God's love in Christ? What we've experienced in knowing Jesus?

Our story from the Book of Acts today is what I call an "anointed appointment."

It is a model for us of how to be witnesses to what we believe about Christ's love.

Because God didn't just give us this love so we can sit on it – he gave it to share.

God wants us to share His love the people around us – and if we’re open to it, God will set up those appointments for us. You can tell because good things result. One woman I know felt an overwhelming urge one day to call her uncle, whom she hadn’t seen for several years – and who she’d never really liked very much. But this nagging feeling wouldn’t go away, and she finally called him – and it turned out to be his birthday. He was so thrilled to hear from her because he was very lonely. She went to see him and they had some good visits. He died not long after that. That was an anointed appointment.

Another woman I know received a phone call at just the right moment, which affirmed for her that she was on the right path in her life. I had been praying for her earlier that day and after this person called her, she called me up: “What – do you have a direct line to God or something?” It was an anointed appointment. I know you’ve had them – people you meet in the grocery store, or on a plane, who need just what you have to offer – or have just what you need that day. They happen all the time. The first trick for us is to become more aware of them.

And then to start asking for them. If we really share the love we’ve been given, we’ll start asking God: show me who you want me to talk to today.

“God, I’m willing to talk about you with somebody today – but you make the appointment for me. You send them to me.”

I had a friend who did that, and people started coming up to him at lunch, walking with him, talking to him in airports, on the road...

People knew he was a person of faith and wanted to ask him about it, about God. All he did was express his willingness – he trusted God to set up the meetings, and He trusted God to give him the words.

But there is another thing he did, and Philip did, and we can do:

he stayed connected to Jesus, abiding with him through the Holy Spirit. In our gospel reading, we have gone back in time, to before the arrest, the crucifixion, the resurrection; before Good Friday and Easter to the Last Supper. They didn’t know it was the Last Supper, but they knew Something Was Up. Something wasn’t right – Judas had left the room after furtive whisperings; Jesus had gotten up from the table and washed their feet, of all things; Jesus had twisted around the prayers over bread and wine, saying this was his body, his blood and whenever they gathered they should do this to remember him. Why did they have to do something to remember him? Wouldn’t he be with them?

Thankfully someone was paying attention, maybe even taking notes,
Because we have these words to ponder, to wonder about.

These words tell us that Jesus saw a future beyond his physical presence with
these women and men; Jesus saw a future where transforming love would be
offered to people everywhere, and that love would instigate movements to
end poverty and abolish slavery and work for the liberty and justice for all.
He saw God's preferred future for this world – and knew it could only come into
being if his followers abided with him. Stayed connected with him.
Stuck with, stuck to, hung out with, hung in with, hung onto, stayed attached to.
And he knew that once they had received the Holy Spirit
they would be able to stay connected to his life, his life living in them,
and that this life could be renewed anytime they prayed or acted in love,
or did this odd ritual with the bread and the wine.

This life in us is not meant to stay with us – it's meant to get out and about,
to touch other lives as we share our spiritual selves with people around us.
There are still men and women – and children – walking around hungry to know
more about God, to learn more about these rumors they've heard about Jesus.
Can God be trusted? Can the church be trusted?

There are a lot of people like that Ethiopian eunuch – wealthy in worldly goods,
important in political and economic affairs, educated and seriously seeking
after God – who still have a hole in their heart.

That man would have been respected but isolated by the very Judaism he had
voluntarily converted to, because eunuchs were considered not quite whole.
How beautiful it must have been for him to hear Philip tell him how the suffering
lamb he was reading about in Isaiah was the long-awaited Messiah, our Lord
Jesus – and that Christ welcomed all people who believe in Him into the
Kingdom of God, no matter their blemishes. No wonder he immediately
asked to be baptized as soon as he saw some water by the side of the road!

How many people do you know who are excluded – or think they are excluded
because of some private shame – from the richness of community we enjoy here?
We won't always have people who have been reading the bible ask us to make
sense of it for them – sometimes we'll meet people earlier in their journey.
But we can be ready for it to become an anointed appointment.

Here's a prompt that can help a conversation get spiritual:

Tell me about one way you are rich. Tell me about a way you are poor.

Let me tell you about a way I am poor. Let me tell you about a way I am rich.

Obviously, we're not going to start a conversation that way,
unless the person knows they are there for a spiritual conversation.
But say there is someone you kind of know, and you want to know better.
It's a good set of questions.
And don't assume this is too private to talk about – if you pray that prayer, God's
only going to set up appointments for you with people who are ready to explore it.
That Ethiopian dignitary was already open to God – he wanted to know more.
And all Philip did, really, was “he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.”
That's pretty simple. Any child can do it – often better than we do!

What was an anointed appointment by which you came to believe in Jesus Christ?
Yesterday our two vestries met for a retreat day –
we told each other the stories by which we came to be introduced to Jesus.
It's not so hard when we remember we are abiding in Jesus and he in us.
I will ask next week if anyone prayer for and had an anointed appointment.
I can't wait to hear about yours.

Amen.

John 15:1-8

Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. **Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.** I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. **My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."**

1Corinthians 12:12-27

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot were to say, 'Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear were to say, 'Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body', that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I have no need of you', nor again the head to the feet, 'I have no need of you.' On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honourable we clothe with greater honour, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honour to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.