



How many of you have seen the movie “Hidden Figures”? It’s one of the best movies I’ve seen in a long time. If you haven’t seen it, it’s the true story of three young black women with crazy mad analytical skills who serve as “human computers” for NASA. These three women made it possible to send John Glenn into orbit in 1962. They were geniuses and should have been recognized as national treasures, but because of their race and their gender they worked in an environment in which they weren’t welcomed and were often disdained. As you watch the story unfold you begin to realize that these women weren’t just laboring to put an astronaut into orbit; they were teaching a culture about our common humanity.

There’s something similar happening in today’s scripture reading. It’s a story about outsiders and insiders. It’s a story about surprising spiritual changes in the hearts of two men. Let’s read the story together in Acts 8:26-40 [MSG].

To modern ears, this story is just plain weird. But when you understand what it meant to its original audience you discover that it’s surprisingly profound and relevant. But to get from weird to profound and relevant you need to know a few things about the early Church and this Ethiopian Eunuch.

When this story took place, the early Church assumed that only Jews could be followers of Jesus. Jesus was, after all, the Jewish Messiah.

And then there’s this Ethiopian Eunuch. If you don’t know what a eunuch is, let’s just say that it’s a guy who is missing certain parts. I can’t say more than that and actually keep this sermon rated PG. And because he was a eunuch he wasn’t allowed to be a Jew. He wasn’t even allowed to worship in the temple. He was an outsider. Which is why it

seems strange that God would send Philip to the converse with this man in the first place. Philip is a Jew, an insider. The Ethiopian Eunuch was an outsider. They had little in common.

Except that this Ethiopian Eunuch is reading the Jewish scriptures. And he’s curious about them. There’s a spiritual hunger in this man. And I just love what Philip does next. Philip sprints down this hot, desert road, robe flapping in the wind, chasing this chariot.

Now don’t forget, this Ethiopian Eunuch is a big deal. He holds an important political position back in Ethiopia. He’s obviously educated – because he can read – and probably wealthy. So, let me ask you – if you were that Ethiopian traveling on this deserted stretch of desert road and some wild man came out of nowhere, running after your chariot, what would you do? I know what I’d do, but that wouldn’t make for a very good bible story!

These two men, who have nothing in common, strike up a conversation. And not only that, but the Ethiopian welcomes Philip into his chariot, and Philip accepts the offer. And that leads to one of my favorite images in the entire bible. These two men, who shouldn’t even be talking to one another, ride together down a dessert road having themselves a little bible study! Philip connects what the Ethiopian Eunuch is reading in Isaiah to the Good News of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. And that Good News seems to connect with the Ethiopian’s spiritual hunger.

And then this whole story comes to this one magic moment. They come upon a little water and the Ethiopian Eunuch raises the question, “Here’s water. Why can’t I be baptized?” Why can’t you be baptized? Well let’s see. You’re the wrong color and the wrong race. There’s that whole eunuch thing. You’re an outsider. And you haven’t even gone through 10 weeks of confirmation class with Jason Kramme. There are all sorts of reasons that Philip could have given for why the Eunuch couldn’t be baptized. But he didn’t give any of those reasons. Because none of them mattered. And because in that moment it wasn’t just the Ethiopian Eunuch who was spiritually changed; Philip was changed too. Philip’s eyes were opened, and so were his heart and his mind to understand that God’s love is for all people, and the path to following Jesus is a road that all are welcome to travel. And in the end these two men, who had nothing in common, who met as perfect strangers, depart as brothers in the faith.

Weird story. Yet profound and relevant. Relevant because it reminds us that right now, at this very moment, outside these walls are people in whom the Holy Spirit is at work, growing a spiritual hunger. And to many of them Prince of Peace is about the last place they would think to come to satisfy their hunger. And to us, many of them seem like strangers, outsiders. They don't look like us. They don't sound like us. They are like the three women in the movie "Hidden Figures". They are like the Ethiopian Eunuch in today's scripture reading. And so, the question is, will we ignore them, or will we respond to the Spirit's call to chase the chariot?

How will we engage with the restless child sitting near us in worship? [picture]

How will we engage the Somali man who stands in line behind us in the grocery store, or who works as a nursing assistant in our care facility? [picture]

How will we engage senior who sits in isolation, feeling that the world no longer values them? [picture]

How will we engage with the one who begs at the side of the road? [picture]

How will we engage with the person who walks into this sanctuary for the first time and sits alone? [picture]

How will we engage with the young adult, covered in tattoos and piercings? [picture]

Will we ignore them, letting them know with our non-engagement that they are indeed outsiders? Or will we chase the chariot? Will we engage with them and extend to them the love of Jesus in simple words and simple actions? Today we're celebrating the Affirmation of Baptism of 26 kids. These are young adults in whom the Spirit has been growing a spiritual hunger, and today we've gathered to celebrate with them that that hunger is being satisfied in Jesus, the Bread of Life. I thank God for this place called Prince of Peace that continues to point hungry people to Jesus.

And today we're receiving the commitments of all disciples at Prince of Peace for the ONE Church Campaign. We're building a house in which God's ministry can thrive under one roof. We're building a house for disciples today, but we're also building a house for those who are yet to come, those who have yet to be born and those who are still out on wilderness roads riding in their chariots. We're building a place where the people in whom the Holy Spirit is growing

a spiritual hunger can come and find bread, not just for their bellies but for their souls. We're building a house for a generation that needs to know Jesus as we do.

Three extraordinary women helped to put John Glenn into orbit. The Spirit puts a hunger into the hearts of human beings. We are called to chase the chariots. We are blessed to build a place where we and they can call home and feast on the Bread of Life. Let's pray...