

“You Shall Be My Witness”
“Unexpected Witness”

We are STILL in Easter. While Lent is forty days, the Celebration of Easter is fifty days, ending with Pentecost and the gift of the Holy Spirit. During these Easter days, our gospels readings will mostly focus on lives that are changed because they experienced the resurrected Jesus. They then become witnesses to the new life Christ offers. The purpose of the church and particularly the Easter season is to know new life in Jesus and to witness the resurrection in our life and spirit. We are sent as witnesses to what God has and is and will do in the world. Christ is Risen! Christ is Risen, Indeed!!! --
-Pastor Cindy

Things I'd like to remember from today's sermon: "Unexpected Witness"

Prayer for the Week

God of new beginnings, free us from the fear of change. May our experience of Easter so change our lives that they express your boundless love. Amen (Joy Tetley, England)

This week's sermon may be viewed at <http://sundaystreams.com/go/firstwichita>

Study Guide

Monday, April 23 John 10: 11-13

The gospel of John is filled with “I Am” statements from Jesus, about Jesus. In the verses preceding these, Jesus says, “I am the gate of the sheep.” The gate protects the sheep from thieves and others. The gate blocks out the enemy, if you will. Jesus then says “I am the good shepherd.” Shepherd imagery for Jesus is so comfortable and promising and often reminds us of the 23rd Psalm. The Hebrew scripture is filled with images of bad shepherds, or those unwillingly to take care of the sheep, the hired hands if you will. Jesus wants us to know that we are so loved and cared for. A hired hand just does a job, but not Jesus. Knowing the good Shepherd loves us, gives us courage to be witnesses to the grace and love of God. *How do you experience the love and care of Jesus, the good Shepherd?*

Tuesday, April 24 John 10: 14 -16

Jesus reminds us that not only is he the good Shepherd, but he knows us and we know his voice. There are “other sheep” Jesus notes that may be different, but Jesus loves them as well and must lead them. One flock, one Shepherd who will lead them and love them. Experiencing Easter is not about everyone being alike or belonging in the same way. Christians worship in different ways, have different understandings and traditions, but we have the same Shepherd. Our differences mean that our witness can reach out to more people in ways that they too can experience Christ. *How many different Christians do you know? How does the differences in theology, practice and witness strengthen your relationship?*

Wednesday, April 25 Acts 8: 26-29

Philip is one of the seven deacons (a term not used in the bible) that are set apart to be in ministry to the widows and the poor. After the death of Stephen, we are introduced to Philip who begins preaching and doing ministry. In the readings from Sunday, we find Philip following the lead of the Spirit and heading out on the road from Jerusalem to Gaza. With no other instruction, Philip goes, open to where God is leading him. He comes upon an Ethiopian, and not just a simple man, but an official to the queen and a eunuch. The issues around this man are major. This is before Saul has had his conversion, before Peter’s vision of inclusivity. Now, the fact that he was reading Isaiah says he was probably a “God-fearer” an outsider who may have practiced Judaism. Nonetheless, the fact he was a eunuch meant he could not become Jewish or visit the Temple because he was “damaged.” Yet, how profound is this willingness of Philip to engage with this man. *Who is Christ calling you to be engaged with as a witness to Christ?*

Thursday, April 26 Acts 8: 30-35

Philip asks if he understands what he is reading. Of course he doesn’t, so Philip shares his understanding of the scripture AND the good news of Jesus. Philip witnesses to a foreigner, an outsider and a less than physically perfect human being. Philip witnesses to someone not acceptable in so many ways: ethnically, religiously, and sexually. The good news of Christ is for all people in all places. It was true for Jesus, for the early church and is a challenge for the 21st century. *For whom do you struggle to be a witness? Do you believe there are folks outside the parameters of who is acceptable to Christ?*

Friday, April 27 Acts 8: 36-40

The eunuch is baptized and rejoices in God. Philip travels and continues to preach and witness to the good news of Christ Jesus. Traditionally it has been believed that the church in Ethiopia was begun at Pentecost and through several of the Apostles. However, in the New Testament, it was this scripture that speaks of the first baptism of an Ethiopian. The Church itself, is somewhat different from the Western Church for many reasons. If you want to research it, search for the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. It has fascinating history and tradition. This scripture reminds us that the “different sheep” that Jesus refers to are part and parcel of the kingdom of God. *How are you honoring this great community of faith that includes different races, creeds and practices? How will your witness help you live out this great good news of Jesus Christ?*