

Acts 8:26-40

This Ethiopian eunuch realized something that every true Lutheran Christian also realizes—to properly understand the Word of God it is necessary to have a guide teach and explain it. If you did not believe this, you would not be here in church. Why come to hear a man explain the Bible when it would be easier to simply read it for an hour at home? And why do we Lutherans insist that our pastors are trained, not by simply reading the Bible for four years straight, but by learning at the feet of other pastors and professors during those four years, and studying the books of many theologians, not just for those four years, but on a regular basis? Would you want a medical doctor to work on you who doesn't bother keeping up with modern medicine by carefully reading the latest medical journals? A pastor, also, needs to keep learning by reading God's Word and by studying what other faithful teachers of the church have written to explain it.

Reading the Bible is a little like preparing sushi. Unless you are properly trained to prepare this fish, it can be a deadly meal to whoever eats it. The Bible is also a deadly instrument in the hands of untrained men. Muslims, Jews, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, Unitarians, among others, all read the Bible, but not to their eternal salvation, but to their damnation. The Pharisees in Jesus' day faithfully read the Scriptures, but Jesus says that they were on the road to hell. "Blind guides leading the blind," is what He said of them.

When the Ethiopian eunuch was reading the Prophet Isaiah in his chariot he was just as blind as they. But the guide who came to him was not blind. Philip, at his invitation, climbed up into his chariot and explained the Bible to him. "He preached Jesus to him," we're told. He taught him the Christian Faith. Philip did not simply read the Bible to him. He did not say, "You have the Word of God in your hands...that's all you need." No! With the Spirit's leading, Philip taught him what is written in the Scriptures. He was his guide into the Word of God. He explained what the Scriptures teach about sin and grace, about the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, about what Jesus' death and resurrection meant for him.

Oh that each one of us was like that eunuch! Not above being taught, but humbly desiring to learn. Not unteachable, but having a heart always yearning to understand the truth. How sad for the person who thinks that he doesn't need the church; doesn't need a guide into the Scriptures. Such an arrogant and pompous attitude will only serve to keep that one blinded from the truth of Christ. "I have a Bible at home and that's all I need," is the attitude of some. But that eunuch said no such thing. He rejoiced that Philip was there to serve as his guide into the Scriptures.

Today we celebrate the anniversary of our "Philip"—our guide into the Bible. Now sadly, there may be some who think that June 25th is a day when Lutherans dishonor the Bible because we celebrate another book on this day. June 25th is the anniversary of the Presentation of the Augsburg Confession...our "Philip." At a meeting in Augsburg, Germany in 1530 this confession was read in the presence of Emperor Charles V as a basic and clear statement of what Lutherans believe.

And some will ask, "Why didn't the Lutherans just say, 'We believe and confess what the Bible teaches?'" Because Rome also claimed to believe what the Bible teaches. But the Roman Church, then and now, teaches that sinners are not saved by grace, through faith in

Jesus Christ, and they condemn those of us that do teach this. Rome claims the Bible teaches that sinners must contribute toward saving themselves; that Jesus' death did not pay for all of your sins; and that sinners must gain God's forgiveness by what they do. Therefore it was necessary at Augsburg, and still is today, to declare that, on the basis of Scripture, this is what we, as Lutherans, believe, teach, and confess... (please follow along with me on the back of your bulletin as I read the section from the Augsburg Confession on Justification) ...

“Our (Lutheran) churches teach that men cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works, but are freely justified for Christ's sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor, and that their sins are forgiven for Christ's sake, who, by His death, has made satisfaction for our sins. Romans 3 and 4

You will not find these words written down word-for-word anywhere in the Bible. And yet, the Bible clearly teaches this saving truth. The Augsburg Confession does not dishonor the Bible, but it is our “Philip” because it teaches this and many other truths of the Holy Scriptures to us.

When you were a small child, you did not come to know your Savior by opening up the pages of the Bible. Hopefully you were given one, but your parents did not hand you a Bible and say, “Here, go and learn what it says.” You needed a “Philip,” and a “Philip” is what God gave you. The Small Catechism, which you studied, teaches in a simpler way, the same truths explained in the Augsburg Confession—the truths of God's Word. The Sunday School lessons and Day School classes were a “Philip” to you, for they taught the same truths to you. The sermons teach to you what the Bible says. The pastor doesn't simply get up here in the pulpit and read the Scriptures to you, but he stands here, and like Philip, explains the truths of the Bible to you. Hopefully your parents read the Word of God to you at home, but then also discussed that Word with you becoming a “Philip” to you.

The Ethiopian eunuch certainly cherished that Book of Isaiah. It was a treasure to him as he went on his way home rejoicing. And don't you think that he also cherished that visit by Philip? As Philip explained the Scriptures to him, now that eunuch would have the opportunity to be a “Philip” to his own people in Ethiopia. He would have the privilege of teaching them the same truths of the Bible that he had just been taught by Philip.

What made Philip truly a blessing to that man is that Philip did not preach himself—“he preached Jesus to him.” And that is why we celebrate the Augsburg Confession on this day... because it does not preach and point to itself; it does not preach Martin Luther; it preaches Christ! It's all about Jesus in all of its pages.

If you know and believe that you are a poor sinner who cannot save yourself, then thank God that He gave you a “Philip,” our Lutheran Confessions, to teach this truth of Scripture to you. If you cherish Baptism and the Lord's Supper as means by which God gives us His grace, then thank God for the Augsburg Confession, our “Philip.” If you know and believe that Jesus Christ has saved you, a wretched sinner, by His sufferings, death, and resurrection, and that there is nothing you need do, or can do to make this salvation your

own—but Christ did it all for you—then thank God for our “Philip,” the Small Catechism and Augsburg Confession.

Because God has called me to be your “Philip” at this time, what a privilege for me to be able to preach Jesus to you! Not just to “tell” you about Him. Not just to “explain” what He did...but to preach Jesus into your heart. That’s what Philip did. And that is what the Augsburg Confession enables me to do for you.

Friend, you are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. God knows that you did not study your Catechism as faithfully as you could have. He knows that still today you often tune out the “Philip” in the pulpit. He forgives you. He forgives your lack of desire to learn His Truth, and because He forgives you He helps to strengthen that desire within you. He knows that you were not the “Philip” to your children you could have been. He forgives you. And do you realize that the reason why you can know and believe with joy that you are completely forgiven is because of the Augsburg Confession? You will never, ever be told in a Roman Church, “As a called and ordained servant of Christ, I forgive you all your sins.” But this is exactly what you receive in the Church of the Augsburg Confession. Not the potential to be forgiven—but real forgiveness, here and now. Not forgiveness based upon your works and efforts—but forgiveness free of charge, based upon Christ’s works and efforts for you—no strings attached, given to you as a gift in Jesus Christ.

Because we are the Church of the Augsburg Confession, I can stand up here before you and tell you that God holds nothing against you. He is completely at peace in His heart with you because Jesus died on a cross for you. Because we are the Church of the Augsburg Confession, I have the privilege of announcing to you that your sinfulness cannot keep you out of heaven. In Baptism Jesus washed you clean of your sins. Heaven is yours right now in Jesus Christ.

In this day when so many are searching for the truth, our Lutheran Confessions guide us into the truths of God’s Word. In this day when so many cry, “It doesn’t matter what you believe”...our Lutheran Confessions proclaim: “This is what God’s Word teaches, and this we believe!” In this day when God’s Word is twisted, and doubted, and said to be outdated, our Lutheran Confessions take us to the sure message of Jesus and His cross so that we rejoice in the knowledge of our salvation.

Never apologize for being a Lutheran! Never be ashamed of your heritage; of what was handed down to us from former generations. Thank God for the Augsburg Confession, and the Small Catechism, and all the other Lutheran Confessions, for they are our “Philip”—a faithful guide into God’s Holy Word. Amen.