

“I Praise You: Guide My Steps”

It might be helpful, before we closely examine our Scripture from Acts, if we consider the Jewish expectations of what would happen because of the promised Messiah. Psalm 22 is a Reading, which dealt with the results of the fulfillment of the Messianic Promise. As we look at verses 25-31 of that Psalm, there are several important insights. One change, which will come because of the Messiah is ***“The poor will eat as much as they want”***. Another more radical difference that is found repeatedly in these verses of the Psalm demonstrates all people of every nation will join in the special relationship God’s Children share with our Divine Parent. **For example, verses 27-29 state, “All nations will remember the Lord. From every part of the world they will turn to Him; all races will worship Him. The Lord is King, and He rules the nations. All proud people will bow down to Him; all mortals will bow down before Him.”**

In anticipation of all this coming about because of the promise of the Messiah being fulfilled, the psalmist provides an example for all people, including ourselves. The psalm praises God as it states in **verse 25a, “In the full assembly I will praise You for what You have done”**. Since the disciple, Phillip, and we recognize Jesus is the fulfillment of the Messianic Promise, an important aspect of our Worship Celebration is to praise God!

We praise the Divine Parent, Who sent the Messiah, God’s Son, Jesus Christ, to prove the Creator’s Agape Love for us and Forgiveness of us, as well as, to invite and welcome us into the New Life and Relationship with God’s Self! So, what is the nature of this New Relationship with the Almighty? One answer came to mind as I read a story shared by James Moore about a “man who ordered a tree house over the internet”. Moore explained, “When the box arrived, it had printed on the top the words that have become every parent’s nightmare: ‘Some assembly required.’”

The tale continued, “The man began to assemble the tree house (but would you believe it?) as he laid out all the parts on the floor and began reading the instructions, he realized (to his dismay) that the instructions were indeed for a tree house? but the parts were for a sail boat!!

The next day, he sent an angry e-mail message to the company complaining about the mix-up. Back came the reply: ‘We are truly sorry for the error and the mix-up and the inconvenience. However, it might make you feel better to consider the fascinating possibility that somewhere today there is a man out on a lake trying to sail your tree house.’”

Moore concluded, “The point is clear: To put something together, you have to have the right parts and the right instructions.” (James W. Moore, Collected Sermons, Sermons.com)

Recognizing we need the right instructions – to be guided in our New Life in Christ, our Scripture from Acts provides us some important insights into the Source of the Guidance we need. On the face of it, our Reading may seem to only deal with the Ethiopian eunuch needing and receiving guidance. However, Philip received instructions or steps three times as reported in the Text. They were from:

***“an angel”,
“the Spirit”, and again,
“the Spirit”.***

Specifically, in verse 26, “an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’ That was to get Philip to the right location for his next step in God’s Dance. **Next, in verse 29, “the Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over to this chariot and join it.’”** That was to get Philip to help guide the Ethiopian eunuch to Jesus Christ. **Finally, in verse 39b, after baptizing the eunuch, “the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away”.** That was to put Philip in his next setting for ministry. So, God’s Guidance – Ordering of steps was even for one of the Original Disciples of Jesus. Therefore, being open to our Divine Parent Leading, Guiding, Ordering our steps is potentially very valuable for each of us!

There is another, even more valuable insight – learning – guidance, which a more in depth examination of our Reading from Acts provides us. The Legalistic Tradition of the Jews was dominate in the society during the Public Ministry of Jesus. It was frequently manifested by the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law. On previous occasions, I have pointed out they were adversaries of Jesus and were successful in getting him executed. They were unhappy with Jesus breaking all their rules and mores. Jesus frequently challenged their prejudices and

judgmentalism. **With reference to Philip's interaction with and assisting in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch, God, especially through the working of the Holy Spirit, broke the laws and traditions of the legalists.**

Bert Slofstra pointed out, "The law of Moses says, 'No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the Lord' (Deuteronomy 23:1). As one Bible scholar put it, the Ethiopian eunuch would have been regarded as 'sexually ambiguous, socially ostracized, and morally evil.' ("Walls Fall Down" by Rev. Bert Slofstra, Abbotsford BC) For the legalists in Philip's and Jesus' day, interacting with the Ethiopian eunuch was forbidden to a person belonging to God. **That would have especially been the case because his sexuality was not something he or anyone else could control, and thus, he was a threat to the whole legalistic approach to sexuality.** It would be helpful, perhaps, for legalists today to come to terms with the reality that God guided Philip to go against their prejudices and laws to actually invite, welcome, and accept the Ethiopian into the Church – the Body of Christ – the Community of Believers. It appears to be true that God the Divine Parent, God the Holy Spirit, and God the Son All broke the Pharisees' Laws and have shown the better way of Agape Love and Welcome of all people – regardless of the sexuality, nationality, race, or any other human distinction used to put some people down and reject them.

Before we close this study of Philip's encounter with the Ethiopian eunuch, there is one additional insight of which I believe we should give serious consideration. **Verses 30-31 are revealing and instructive for this last aspect of focus, "So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' He replied, 'How can I, unless someone guides me?' And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him."** The Spirit called Philip to go to the Ethiopian eunuch and the foreign leader invited the disciple to come join him, so he might guide his steps in understanding the Isaiah Scripture, which was about the Messiah. Unfortunately, there are a large majority of persons, who don't know about Jesus' message of God's Forgiveness, Agape Love, Invitation, and Welcome because the popular understanding of Christianity is much more akin to the Pharisees and the Teachers of the Law and that is frankly, not inviting to most folks, so they avoid all churches. On the other hand, most persons are like the Ethiopian eunuch – someone searching for that which they do not know about – God's Forgiveness, Agape Love, and Radical and Extravagant Invitation and Welcome into the New Life in Christ and New Relationship with God. **It is rare when someone, who is in such need and also in need of guidance to find it does so, because they don't know where to go or to whom to ask.** Friends, each of us from time to time becomes aware of such an individual, who needs someone to guide them to find out about and live the New Life in Christ and New Relationship with God. Let Philip's experience embolden us to be open to our call to help others find the guidance and praise of God they need in their lives.

Finally, we are called to follow the example of the Word made Flesh – Jesus Christ and to be open to God Ordering our steps – Guiding us in our full and complete living of the New Life in Christ and the New Relationship with our Loving Divine Parent! A story by an unknown author serves as a good reminder. It goes: "When I meditated on the word Guidance, I kept seeing 'dance' at the end of the word. I remember reading that doing God's will is a lot like dancing.

When two people try to lead, nothing feels right. The movement doesn't flow with the music, and everything is quite uncomfortable and jerky.

When one person realizes that, and lets the other lead, both bodies begin to flow with the music.

One gives gentle cues, perhaps with a nudge to the back or by pressing lightly in one direction or another.

It's as if two become one body, moving beautifully. The dance takes surrender, willingness, and attentiveness from one person and gentle guidance and skill from the other.

My eyes drew back to the word Guidance. When I saw 'G' I thought of God, followed by 'u' and 'i'. 'God,' 'u' and 'I' dance. God, you and I dance.

As I lowered my head, I became willing to trust that I would get guidance about my life. Once again, I became willing to let God lead." Amen.