

Main Idea: An “A” game of Christian living will involve spirit led proclamation.

When Mike and I sat down to think about our sermon study for Eastertide, we naturally thought about resurrection. We talk a lot about resurrection in the church, but I don’t think we really know what its implications are for us. It seems to me that most of the time, resurrection is only considered with regards to the afterlife, but I have to think, and in fact, I am convinced that resurrection means more than that.

So we started asking ourselves, what it means to live this side of the resurrection. If we partake of life in Christ, then it means that we partake of the resurrection. As Christians, we are to not just die to experience resurrection, but we are live a resurrection life. But what does that mean, how do we know what resurrection living is exactly?

And that is where our series came from. We can learn about resurrection living, from those who have gone before us, from those who also had to figure out what resurrection life was all about. Who better to learn these lessons from than the apostles? After all, the apostles, like us had all kinds of preconceived notions about following Christ. When Christ was crucified, those preconceived notions were also nailed to the cross. Resurrection rocked their world. They did not have it all figured out of course, but we see through Scriptures, a continuing discovery process by the apostle and those first Christians of living the resurrected life. So we began to focus on the apostolic examples given to us primarily from the book of Acts.

We decided to call the series, *Getting your “A” Game*. The “A” stands for apostles, but the phrase is typically used in culture to mean, giving it your best. So our whole big idea here in our series, is that we can learn from the apostles on how to better live out our resurrected life. In fact, we need to give it our best shot. The Christian life demands our very best, it can not be a mere convenience, nor can the resurrected life only have post mortem implications. Resurrected living is about becoming “*fully mature, fully developed, fully alive like Christ.*”<sup>1</sup>

So we continue our study this week, by looking at the great evangelist, Philip. It should be noted that Philip is not technically an apostle, but rather one the helpers, chosen in Acts 6 to tend to the needs of an ever changing, rapidly growing new church.

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<sup>1</sup> Eugene Peterson’s paraphrase of Ephesians 4:13

But that is of no matter. Philip is clearly a person who has been transformed by the resurrection and his life is being shaped by its implications.

Now Luke does a masterful job in capturing the scene and it has become a well known account in the great book of Acts. I have read numerous times, but I kept trying to avoid its meaning. I kept looking for a new angle, a new insight, but I kept coming back to the main point. I didn't want to go there, but I couldn't get away from it. So I finally submitted and admitted that in this wonderful text this morning, Philip helps us to understand that if you want to have an "A" game in the Christian life, then it will involve Spirit-led proclamation of the good news.

Now let me ask you if you got what I just said, because this kind of statement often creates some interesting feelings for some. I have just proposed that living a resurrected life involves Spirit-led proclamation of the good news. What do I mean? Anyone have maybe a word that we could use to capture my thought? Anyone think of the word "evangelism?" Ah yes! Evangelism?! Don't we recovering Baptists know all about that word? Or do we?

Last week during communion time, I spoke briefly about the revivalist tradition that I was raised in. Now I do not want to give the impression that I am bitter or unhappy with my church experiences as a child, not in the least. I feel blessed to have been surrounded by so many saints. I believe my church was healthy at the time when I was coming of age, and I cherish the formation it had in me. But like 99% of Baptist churches it was tremendously influenced by the revivalism that swept our region following the 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Awakening. Revivalism, with its emphasis on a point of decision and its all or nothing attitude tremendously impacted me. I remember some services where we would have an invitation, even when we didn't do anything in the service. It was a mentality that said, you need to offer an invitation on any and every occasion. You never would think of ending a worship service without giving an altar call. That would be failing in your Christian responsibility.

This type of thinking also created a real sense of urgency. You were taught about sharing your faith. You were trained in presentation methods. And basically you were told that "the blood of those you meet will be on your hands, if you do not share Christ with them." It was a nice guilt inducing spiritual formation.

Over the years I came to believe that becoming a Christian was a much a process as it was a moment of decision. I saw the abuse of evangelism and the disrespect it afforded to many. I experienced the guilt that was induced because, I really did want to please God and do the right thing, but I didn't hand tracts out to everyone I met. And as I began to change, I found myself in a weird place of being a theological evangelical (notice I said theological not cultural) but rebelling against many forms of evangelism.

This was a real conflict for me. I was pastoring a church that while we said we celebrated the journey, we emphasized the moment. So I gathered together a list of pastors whom I respected, I have sent them all an e-mail. Basically it asked, what are you guys doing about evangelism in your church? What does evangelism look like for those of use that tend to be more moderate in our persuasion? I thought it was a good e-mail, honest, vulnerable, and paying homage to them as I sought their wisdom. I got nothing. No one had anything to offer, except one admission from a very prominent pastor, who simply wrote, "We moderates don't do evangelism very well."

Well that may be the case, but I can't just stop there. Evangelism is clearly important and if we want to bring our "A" game to this Christian life, if we want to give it our best, then we are going to have to figure out this evangelism thing, and I think that Philip from our scripture lesson this morning, really helps us along in that endeavor. Let me just make a couple observations about evangelism from this wonderfully crafted story. I will toss them out to you as you process what all this means for you.

The first thing, I noticed, about this narrative in Acts 8, is that Philip evangelist efforts were always Spirit led. Listen to the verses again:

"Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip..." (v. 26)

"The Spirit told Philip..." (v. 29)

"The Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away..." (v. 39).

It doesn't require a Master of Divinity to understand that the Spirit was the initiator in this process, the driving force guiding Philip in his ministry to the Ethiopian eunuch. So I think I am on solid ground when I say that evangelism must be spirit driven, not market driven.

Evangelism is not marketing! It is not about growing your church so that you have the biggest crowd and the nicest facilities. Both my experience and my observation

had led me to believe that too many Christians and churches believe that evangelism is about themselves. I haven't seen a whole lot of Spirit sensitive evangelism, but I have seen a lot of market sensitive evangelism.

Philip was told by the Spirit of God to go south, and he did. We need that type of sensitivity. We don't need to wait until we have a crisis of attendance or a big program to put on to all of a sudden decide we need to go tell folks the good news. We soothe a lot of our self centeredness by calling it evangelism, and I have known this from experience.

While I was pastoring my previous church, I felt this dilemma most prominently. I knew that the church needed to be more community oriented, but I didn't know what that meant or what to do. So I did what I was taught, I reinvented the visitation program, called it something else, trained folks in how to share the gospel and we would go out. We would go to people we knew but sometimes we would go where we didn't know anyone. We had not invested ourselves there, we didn't have a relationship with them, we just showed up.

I remember one evening, it was a cold call so to speak, and I shared with this guy, and this guy prayed to receive Christ as his Savior. Now I don't know what happened because our follow up efforts never worked with him, but I remember questioning to myself if the guy really knew what he was doing, or just wanted us to leave. But out of that situation, I began to question my motives. I was not led by the Spirit to that apartment building that night, I was on a campaign to try and increase our church's market share. Now of course it doesn't appear that sinister and there are good intentions involved but too often churches and Christians are tempted by the success ridden gospel of the markets rather than a faithful sensitivity to the Spirit.

Philip was led by the Spirit and he was obedient to that leading. In another sermon perhaps we will talk about the importance of being obedient if you are bringing your "A" game to resurrection living. The Spirit tells him to approach the eunuch. Philip hears him reading and asks him if He understands what he is reading (v. 30).

Now I love what Philip is demonstrating for us, because he shows tremendous respect. Evangelism must be governed by respect for others. An "A" game in

resurrection living demands respect. Philip asks questions of eunuch! That is noteworthy. He gets aboard the Ethiopians chariot only after being invited.

These are lesson we would do well to remember. God honoring evangelism requires that we respect those to whom we offer the good news. This is a high ranking Ethiopian, but he is clearly not like Philip. He was a spiritual seeker, but his culture was foreign to that mentioned most prominently in the Bible.

We must be willing to respect the image of God in those to who are not like us. You wouldn't know it from the political ads that are currently airing, but not everyone is middle class, traditional thinking, conservatives, with two kids and a dog. Our churches are even worse sometimes. How can we expect to have a listening audience from those not like us, if we are always using our pulpits to blast them. The thing that I see Philip modeling for us is sensitivity to the Holy Spirit and a respect for other people. That combination leads to evangelism that we can feel good about, not ashamed of.

Now let me be clear! **We must proclaim the resurrection if we are live in the resurrection.** It is good news and we should want to share it. But we must share it as a Spirit led, initiated and driven effort. We must share it with the utmost respect for others. We must share it because resurrection life isn't about you or our churches success, it is about kingdom living. A Christ honoring, other respecting, Spirit led evangelism is key to resurrection living. And when done the right way it is good news for all.