

ENTER THE KINGDOM

THE LESSON: ACTS 8

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,
baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.
And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20).*

These are the words of the “Great Commission” given by Jesus to his disciples before he ascended into heaven. So the disciples were left with a task to do, and that task involved sharing the Gospel, baptizing those who believed, and instructing them in the faith so that they too would become strong disciples, ready to share in this mission.

But why baptize? Why not just preach and teach? Baptism is “an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace” (BCP p. 550). It is a moment when we (or our parents on our behalf) make our new life official. Baptism declares “a death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness” (BCP p. 551), and that we have been “made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven” (BCP p. 532). Wow, right?

So baptism signals a new start for us as individuals within the Church. In Christ, we have a whole new identity, a whole new purpose. As St. Paul wrote: “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come... Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:17, 20).

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Let’s take a look at a story from the book of Acts. Jesus had ascended into heaven. His disciples had been given the Great Commission to carry out. But fierce persecution against the believers had broken out and many of them had scattered. In spite of this, Philip and his friends were through with hiding. They had seen their resurrected Lord and knew that he was with them, guiding them in their mission.

AT-HOME CHALLENGE

Each morning and evening, follow your own rule of prayer.

(IF YOU DON’T HAVE ONE, TRY SAYING THE MORNING AND EVENING PRAYERS FROM THE “FORMS OF PRAYER TO BE USED IN FAMILIES”, WHICH BEGINS ON PAGE 728 OF THE BCP. IF YOU DON’T HAVE A COPY, YOU CAN LOOK IT UP HERE: [HTTP://PRAYERBOOK.CA/RESOURCES/BCPONLINE/FAMILY-PRAYER.](http://prayerbook.ca/resources/bcponline/family-prayer))

During this unit, we’re going to take some of the prayers that come from the liturgies of Baptism and Confirmation and pray them for one another as a reminder and a renewal of commissioning.

Spend some time reflecting on and praying with the words of this prayer:

Almighty and everlasting God, As thou hast promised in thy holy Word, saying, Ask, and ye shall have; seek, and ye shall find, knock, and it shall be opened unto you: So give now unto us that ask; let us that seek find; open the gate unto us that knock; that these persons being stedfast in faith, joyful through hope, and rooted in charity, may come to thy eternal kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

(ADAPTED FROM THE MINISTRATION OF HOLY BAPTISM TO SUCH AS ARE OF RIPER YEARS, BCP PAGE 533)

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ACTS 8: **ON HIS WAY, REJOICING**

²⁶Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go towards the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” This is a desert place. ²⁷And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship ²⁸and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. ²⁹And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” ³⁰So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” ³¹And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³²Now the passage of the Scripture that he was reading was this:

“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter and like a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opens not his mouth. ³³In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

³⁴And the eunuch said to Philip, “About whom, I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” ³⁵Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶And as they were going along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “See, here is water! What prevents me from being baptized?” ³⁸And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. ³⁹And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord carried Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing.