

Heirs of Jesus

Acts 8:26-40

On this Mother's Day, I'm reminded of the story of George and his wife Susan. George is a wonderful husband and a loving, caring father to their baby daughter, Lily. However, as with most men, he often turns to Susan for advice. One morning, she was in the shower when George poked his head in to ask, *"What should I feed Lily for lunch?"* *"That's up to you,"* Susan replied. *"There's all kinds of food. Why don't you pretend I'm not home?"* A few minutes later, as Susan was getting out of the shower, her cell phone rang. So she picked it up off the counter, and when she answered it her husband said, *"Yeah, hi, honey. Uh, what should I feed Lily for lunch?"*

Thank God for mothers! They are wonderful care-givers on whom we depend for so much. That's why God gave us families, with a loving mom and dad, who provide for all our needs. For without a family, I'm sure we would feel lost and lonely, helpless and homeless. Perhaps that's something of the way the man in our text for today felt. St. Luke tells us that he was an Ethiopian eunuch. This probably means that he was from the kingdom of Nubia, serving as the Royal Treasurer for Candace, which was the title of the Nubian queens.

Yet in spite of his high position, in a sense he too was without a home, bereft of family – at least spiritually speaking. Our text tells us that he was a Jewish proselyte. But he probably didn't feel quite at home in the Jewish religion. You see, according to Deuteronomy 32:1, he could never have a permanent place in God's family. Because he was a eunuch, and had been physically maimed, he was not allowed to enter the sanctuary with the rest of the worshippers. Add to that the fact that this man was also a Gentile – a foreigner and he had two strikes against him. So perhaps he felt alone and unwanted like an outcast.

Nevertheless, by God's grace he still had a tremendous Spirit-given faith and confidence in God, because he had just made 100 mile trip to Jerusalem to worship the Lord. And as he was returning home, he was reading the Scriptures. That in itself was quite unusual, because most people did not have their own copy of the Sacred Writings. He probably had purchased this scroll of Isaiah at quite a price. But that's how highly he valued the Word of God.

Dear friends, is that our attitude towards God's Word? Would we pay any price to get it? Do we cherish it at all costs, reading it daily, coming together with other Christians to study it weekly, meditating on it constantly? Or do we take it for granted and let other things come between us and our time in God's Word? It ought to be of paramount important to us like it was to the Ethiopian eunuch, for like him we too have a problem. We too have been maimed – not in body, but in soul. We were all born with the blemish of sin on our heart, like a permanent spot that affects everything we do. It shows itself in our angry temper, our cruel tongue and our selfish thoughts – the way we selfishly want our own way, or pridefully put others down, or vengefully try to get back at someone who has hurt us. In short, sin is like a terrible defect, a hideous imperfection that makes us displeasing in God's sight and cuts us off from His holy family, kicked out of our Heavenly Home, banished to the outer darkness for all eternity.

That's why like the Ethiopian eunuch, we so desperately need the comfort of God's Word. For only in Holy Scripture do we find the Good News that God has eradicated our unsightly blemishes and defects, and adopted us back into His heavenly family as His beloved, forgiven children. That's the Good News the Ethiopian eunuch discovered that wonderful day, when Philip brought him the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our text tells us that the eunuch was reading from the scroll of Isaiah, when the Spirit moved Philip to approach his chariot and explain the meaning of the text. Specifically, he was reading the Song of the Suffering Servant from Isaiah 53: "LIKE A SHEEP HE WAS LED TO THE SLAUGHTER, AND LIKE A LAMB BEFORE ITS SHEARER IS SILENT, SO HE OPENS NOT HIS MOUTH. IN HIS HUMILIATION JUSTICE WAS DENIED HIM. WHO CAN DESCRIBE HIS GENERATION? FOR HIS LIFE IS TAKEN AWAY FROM THE EARTH."

As Philip undoubtedly pointed out to the eunuch, this is a prophecy of the Messiah, Jesus Christ our Savior. He is the Lamb of God, who was slaughtered at the cross, the final sacrifice to atone for all our sins, as well as the sins of the whole world; to cover them up and blot them out for good; to take them away and remove them from the picture forever. That's why it says that, "*His life was taken away from the earth.*" In fact, the verb 'taken' literally means: 'to lift up' – which is

precisely what Jesus has done to our sins. By being lifted up as our substitute on the cross, He has lifted our iniquities off our shoulders and taken them completely away, so that we don't have to carry that burden of guilt and shame any longer.

In the words of our text, He was *denied justice*, so that He could justify you and me, declaring us righteous and innocent of all our sinful crimes. Even though He was the only innocent, guiltless One, He took the charges for us, so that we can be exonerated and acquitted. It brings to mind those times growing up, when my brother and I would get into a fight. Now keep in mind, my brother is ten years older than I am, and quite a bit more muscular. So it was exactly a fair fight. I was like the pesky Chihuahua nipping at the Doberman's heels. But when we were fight, my dad would come into the room to see what was going on. And my brother and I would immediately point the finger at each other and say: "*He started it!*" And then my father would always say that well-known adage that fathers have probably been saying since the beginning of time, what Adam probably said to Cain and Abel: "*I don't care who started it. I want to know who's going to end it.*"

You know, that always puzzled me. I'd think to myself: "*What? That's not justice. If he started it, he should pay for it!*" And that's right, it's not justice. Instead, my father was trying to teach me compassion. You see, the one who ends it is the one who mercifully suffers the wrong, and doesn't retaliate in spite of what has been done to him. What a beautiful picture that gives us of Christ's compassion for you and me. Even though He did nothing wrong, Jesus suffered all our wrongs for us, and put an end to them once and for all at the cross. He's the older brother, who could've crushed us under His little pinky. But in mercy, He allowed Himself to be punished at Calvary, in order to crush our sins into the dust. And then He rose again triumphant from the grave, to bury them and lay them to rest for good! By the miracle of His death and resurrection, He has made our sin and guilt disappear into thin air, with not a trace left behind. And that's why He now considers us His beloved, forgiven children, precious members of His holy family.

That's what Isaiah was getting at, when he said of Jesus the Messiah: "WHO CAN DESCRIBE HIS GENERATION?" Or as it literally says in the Hebrew text: "WHO CAN COUNT HIS DESCENDANTS?" And the answer is: No one, because they are too

numerous. In other words, you and I are those descendants. Indeed all those, who have been baptized into Jesus Christ, have been adopted back into His family as His blood-bought children. Which is exactly what the eunuch received, when he was baptized by Philip – the same thing we received in our Baptism. We have been made his descendants, and more than that – heirs of all the treasures of heaven: forgiveness, salvation, and everlasting life.

Amazingly enough, all of this prophesied elsewhere in Isaiah, at chapter 56, verses 4-5 where the Lord says: “TO THE EUNUCHS WHO KEEP MY SABBATHS, WHO CHOOSE WHAT PLEASURES ME AND HOLD FAST TO MY COVENANT – TO THEM I WILL GIVE WITHIN MY TEMPLE AND ITS WALLS A MEMORIAL AND A NAME BETTER THAN SONS AND DAUGHTERS; I WILL GIVE THEM AN EVERLASTING NAME THAT WILL NOT BE CUT OFF!” What a beautiful promise! Instead of being kicked out of God’s kingdom, we are welcomed with open arms and given an everlasting name – the name of Christian, which means that we belong to Christ and no one and nothing can cut us off from Him.

The interesting thing is that, in Hebrew the phrase ‘a memorial and a name’ is Yad Vashem. As you may know, Yad Vashem is the name of the Holocaust memorial in Israel, dedicated to perpetuating the legacy of the Holocaust to future generations so that the world never forgets the horror and cruelty of it all. At Yad Vashem the Hall of Names is a tribute to the victims of the Holocaust by remembering them not as anonymous numbers but as individual human beings.

Well dear friends, it was at the ultimate holocaust, the cruel and horrible Holocaust of the Cross, that Jesus lovingly gave His life to provide us with an everlasting memorial and a name, so that God would not forget us, not forget to love and forgive us. And according to Isaiah, it’s a name better than that of Sons and Daughters. We are closer to Him than kin. That’s how dearly He cherishes you and me, because we are His heirs by baptism and faith in His saving name.

Recently I read about Kent Whitaker, a Christian man from Sugarland, Texas, whose wife, Tricia and youngest son, Kevin were gunned down in cold blood. Kent was also wounded in the attack, but by the power of the Holy Spirit he was enabled to forgive the killer, even though he didn’t know who it was. When it was later discovered that his

oldest son, Bart, had put out the hit on his own family, Kent still forgave him. Although he was betrayed by his own son, he continues to pray for him and love him.

What a wonderful illustration of God's grace in Christ Jesus. Even though we are the hit men, who murdered Jesus by our sins and betrayed Him by our transgressions, He willingly took the hit for us, in order to forgive us and save us from our sins. And in His grace, He still welcomes us into His family, as His precious, blood-bought children, and heirs of salvation.

How, then should we act? Obviously we should live like His children. As St. John said in our Epistle lesson, we do that by loving one another not only in words and tongue, but in actions and in truth. Not only by praying for one another and speaking words of kindness and encouragement to each other, but by supplying the needs of others and lending a helping hand. Not only by living at peace with one another and gently talking over our differences, but by graciously forgiving each other as just as Christ has done for us. Above all, we live like Jesus' heirs when we do what Philip did – freely sharing the Gospel with others. As Jesus' children, we are called to spread the Good News in order to make more descendants. And according to tradition, that's what the Ethiopian eunuch did. He went back and evangelized his country. May God empower us by His Holy Spirit to do the same thing, for His glory and praise. Amen.