

M R D U C K S...

When the Apostle Philip was directed to travel along the desert road to Gaza, he had no idea what awaited him. He had just been on the run from persecution, then proclaiming the good news of Jesus in Samaria, and there witnessing the healing and converting power of the Holy Spirit at work. This is the account that you may recall about a man called Simon the Sorcerer.

All ended with the furthering of God's Kingdom, but Philip found himself hiking along the Gaza road uncertain of what was coming. But as God would have it, Philip found himself travelling alongside an important treasury man from Ethiopia. The Ethiopian had been up to Jerusalem to worship and as he travelled home, he was reading from the prophet Isaiah. Moved by the Lord, Philip asked, "***Do you understand what you are reading?***" The Ethiopian replied, "***How can I, unless someone explains it to me?***" Then the Ethiopian invited Philip up into his chariot to do just that.



Over these last years, you, our dear confirmands, have been in the catechetical chariot with the God's Word, Martin Lutheran, your parents, your friends, and your pastors. (It's a big chariot.) By God's grace you have been engaged in spiritual conversation, explanation, and application of his Word. And all of it for a very good reason, as Jesus prayed to the Father, ***This is eternal life: that they may know you and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*** It's really that simple: Know Jesus – experience him, understand him, acknowledge him, receive him – and you have eternal life.

But is it, really? I know that these last years haven't been easy. I'm sure that there were moments when memorizing this, studying that, reading something else, may have seemed a real chore. But just like the words of our text for today, parents know what's best and have encouraged, supported, even modelled what it means to know Jesus,

to be loved by him, and to love him in return.

Last Sunday, many of us heard in the readings of how *love* marks us, identifies us, as Jesus *disciples*, as those in the "know," as the *beloved*. As the Apostle John puts it: ***This is love: not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.*** Again, by God's grace, through your time in his Word, you know this. You experience this. You'll even *say* this today, as you publicly profess your love for your Lord, all from thanks-filled hearts for all that he has done for you in Jesus.

But that's not all that there is to thankful love. In our text for today, a continuation from last week's Gospel reading, Jesus takes it a step further. He challenges you, and *all* of us, not only to *say* we love him from thankful hearts, but also to *show* we love him from thankful hearts. He says, ***If anyone loves me, he will hold on to my Word.***

Hmm, that sounds like a "prove it" statement, doesn't it? It's a bit like the story author Emerson Eggerichs like to tell about an arguing couple. The wife says to her husband, "You always *say* that you love me so much that you'd die for me,  but you never do it!" The thing is, Jesus did. As John wrote, he loves you so much that he was willing to die for you. His loving sacrifice ***compels*** (2 Co. 5:14) you to love him in return, so moved are you by the depth of his love for you. Jesus isn't  standing there pointing at you declaring, "You *say* you love me, but you never show it." No, we are so thankful that we are loved by him, we are moved to plead with him, "How can I show my love for you in return?" And Jesus responds literally, ***If anyone will be loving towards me he will continue to hold on to my Word.***

Why have you spent these last years in the Word? Why are you here today? Why are you declaring your intent to remain in the Word? Why are your family and friends here today to witness it? LOVE! Jesus' love for you and your love for him.

But let's face it, showing that love ***in action and in truth*** (1 John 3:18) isn't going

to be easy. You will be uttering “I do’s” today that will often end up with admissions of “I haven’t.” That’s why Jesus lays out the expectation ***If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching...*** then he immediately follows it with a promise: ***My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.*** You see, this isn’t some kind of a divine decree, “Do it because I said so!” This Jesus guiding thankful hearts to respond in love and then following it up with the promise of his very own loving presence as we do it.

In recent years we have witnessed the devastation caused by hurricanes, in recent days the devastation caused by tornadoes. We have seen mass destruction and even random death. Yet in the midst of it all, we have seen again and again that image of a family. The house is gone, but the home remains intact because the family unit stands together. What a beautiful picture of our relationship with our heavenly Father.

Think about it, WE were the ones who had destroyed the house and brought death on ourselves with our own failure to love God with all our hearts...no matter what. Jesus said it, ***He who does not love me does not hold on to my Words.*** And sin and death were the result.

But our heavenly Father longed to ***come to [us] and make [a] home with [us]*** [☪] once again. And in the greatest act of love the world has ever known, he allowed his own son to be crushed and crucified for your sins and mine. His innocent life replaced our guilty life. His suffering and death replaced the suffering and death that should have been ours. His rising from the dead guarantees our own resurrection from the dead. His love for us, again, compels our love for him and one another. And now, he calls on us to show that love in an active way – listening to – keeping – holding on to – his Word.

Silas, I’ve seen first-hand the ability the Lord has given you to strive and make the most of a situation, like the time you turned an 8-mile bike ride with your mom into a trip to Dairy Queen. Jesus now calls on you to recognize the opportunities he

gives you to respond to his love by making the most of those opportunities, ***always giving yourself fully to the work of the Lord.*** (1 Corinthians 15:58)

Evan, the Lord has blessed you with a big heart for people, like the time you were about this tall and out of the blue just gave me a side hug, moving on without a word. Jesus now calls on you to show that same love to those around you, living his love in your life by ***building others up according to their needs.*** (Ephesians 4:29)

Rachel, I’ll never forget your determination to stay on track, like the way, when you were about two or three, you were determined to wear your Vikings cheerleader outfit and Crocs...every day. Your Savior now calls on you to love him by ***standing firm in one spirit, contending ...for the faith of the gospel.***

Yes, to all of us, the loving invitation resounds from our Savior as forgiven brothers and sisters, to show our love for him with total commitment...with his complete promise: ***The word that you are hearing is not mine, but it is from the Father who sent me.*** ²⁵ ***“I have told you these things while staying with you.*** ²⁶ ***But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I told you.*** ²⁷ ***“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid.***

Just as Elisha’s servant found strength in God’s promises, we find the strength we need to show our love for him through our actions. We need not be afraid or troubled. His grace covers our failures and moments of apathy. His Spirit continues to teach us and sanctify us. His peace remains in us even as it is at work around us. This is his promise to you. This is his love for you. This is how he makes his home with you, not just today, but every day, keeping you ***in God’s love as you continue to wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, which results in eternal life.*** (Jude 1:21) This then is your confidence, dearly beloved, now and forever. Amen.