

**5 Easter – Year B – May 13, 2009 - Homily**  
**Acts 9:26-40; Psalm 22:24-30; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8**  
**Susan E. Wilmot**

Have you met anyone new and interesting along your way this week? The angelically organized meeting of Jesus' disciple Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch is a wonderful example of evangelism, and it is also an absurd and wild God-incidence in the lives of the two men. But think about it. How many times in our lives have we encountered strangers in odd situations, and made some kind of instant connection and a memorable impact.

The movie, *Crash*, is just as bizarre and memorable with the lives of a variety of strangers literally bumping, scraping, and crashing together leaving everyone involved changed in some way. Some for the better and some for worse. There's prejudice, injustice, horrible misuses of power and authority, as well as love and loyalty. The movie portrays humanity at its worst and at its best. It is disturbing because the cultural milieu we live in is no different to that presented for our consideration in this movie. The temptations of a sin-sick world don't disappear when we become Christians, but our response to them changes.

Here's what happens to Philip throughout the Gospels and now in his appearance in the Book of Acts. In all three of the synoptic Gospels, Philip is named as one of the twelve apostles. In the Gospel of John, we hear the story of how Philip is found by Jesus, and called to follow. In turn, Philip tells Nathanael about Jesus, and invites him to "come and see". He also plays a role in the feeding of the five thousand as Jesus teasingly asks him, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" Of course, Jesus knew that God's plan contained a much more profound object lesson that mustering enough money to buy bread for the hungry hoards. Philip is the one to whom the Greeks come asking to see Jesus. And Philip is the one who demands that Jesus show them the Father, and is finally told plainly by Jesus that anyone who has seen Him has seen the Father. In the Book of Acts, Philip is in the city of Samaria proclaiming the Gospel, when he is told by the angel to go to the wilderness road between Jerusalem and Gaza. Later in the story we are told, "but Philip found himself at Azotus". Being where God wanted him to be, Philip simply did what he had been called to do – no questions asked. Philip is a God-gifted evangelist, and he proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ to all the towns in that region. By virtue of our Baptism, you and I are also God's witnesses in the world, gathering others to Christ.

While he might not be portrayed as the sharpest crayon in the box, Philip's unquestioning obedience in following Christ, and doing all that he is commanded to do is admirable. I wish I could say I had always followed the Lord unquestioningly! In fact, if we read this account of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch, we notice that while Philip is recorded as opening the scriptures and baptizing the Ethiopian man, he only has a one line part in this story. Now this is probably just me, but perhaps you too were tempted to think that this story was about Philip. Actually, if we follow the narrative carefully, the real focus of the story has more to do with our friend from Ethiopia, hospitality, graciousness, and especially the act of proclaiming the Gospel in word and deed.

God graciously guides Philip through the voice of an angel to the road where he will bump into the Ethiopian eunuch. There's a couple of things to notice here. First, Philip was probably a relatively poor, working class Jewish man, and yet he is entirely unafraid to approach the unusual exotic-looking black man riding along in his carriage, who is obviously very wealthy and probably highly influential. Unlike some of the characters in the movie *Crash*, there is no

prejudice or bias in Philip's love for friends and strangers alike. Just so we get the general picture, this is rather like the equivalent of the homeless man rushing the President of the United States. Equally as strange is the response of the eunuch, who admits that he needs help understanding the prophet Isaiah, and invites Philip to get into the carriage beside him. Here's the modern day equivalent, and try to suspend for a moment that the secret service would be all over this – just picture it as an absurd possibility. President Obama has just wandered out of the White House, and met the homeless man. As he's about to get into his limo and head out, he stops, chats with the man, asking his advice about a tricky foreign policy issue, whilst handing over a packet of cigarettes along with a nice crisp fifty, and then offering him a ride so they can keep on talking. Somehow, that just ain't happening is it?! But let's try something else on for size. What if, we substitute our own name for the President's in this little sketch? And perhaps instead of handing over cigarettes and money, we tell the man about Jesus, baptize our new relationship with coffee and breakfast, and then go buy him a change of clothes and some groceries? Now let's ask ourselves why that would seem so strange.

The gift that Philip shares with us here is one of how it looks to be obedient to Christ, and to do the work that we have been given to do with a joyful heart. The blessing that the story of our friend the Ethiopian eunuch shares with us is one of complete trust and hospitality without prejudice or bias. He has a lively, seeking faith and a humble willingness to learn and grow. He goes on his way into new and unending life rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. The gift of the Holy Spirit in this story is the sure and certain knowledge of God's steadfast love and faithfulness in blessing all our efforts to share the Gospel message, however small and humble. Whether we change the life of one person or many, God is measuring our success by our faithful obedience to His commandments. What a difference we could make for Christ in this world if all our chance encounters ended like the meeting between Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Let's try to pay special attention this week to all the people we meet – all the people that God places in our paths. By word, deed or a combination of both, there are no coincidental crashes, only God-incidences.

Amen.