

Commentary on the Gospel for Thu, Apr 23rd 2015

In today's first reading, we hear about the journey of a court official, referred to only as an "Ethiopian eunuch," and his chance (?) encounter with Philip on the way home. An unusual trip in that he went to Jerusalem to worship, yet it appears he understood very little about Jesus and his fulfillment of the prophecies of old. What was it that drew him to take this journey? Or to continue to study the scriptures during his return trip? Who or what might have inspired Philip to take this route, and nudge him to join up with the eunuch's chariot that he might be instrumental in the eunuch's conversion and baptism?

This passage reminds me of trips and vacations I have taken. Although I'm not fond of traveling in itself, these trips, in addition to whatever conference or vacation was on the agenda, have gifted me with clarity, a changed perspective, an awareness of deeper desires, or a renewed spirit. I recall one time in particular. I had a hiking vacation in Vermont scheduled during a time when I was considering a major change of ministry, a change which would involve quite a bit of risk personally and financially. We were a small group, so there were times we could wander away from the group and contemplate, rest or whatever. As we were hiking, I suddenly noticed a large boulder, not far from the path, with the sun pouring its light directly on it. As it was slightly cool, it was a very inviting spot. As I rested, pondering this decision, there was a moment of great clarity and a desire to take the risks involved. I still have a photo of that spot.

The Gospel reading for today reminds us that the source of these nudges and desires that lead to greater life, love and joy is God, the Divine impulse. "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets: They shall all be taught by God."

Vacations, travel and journeys of all kinds can provide the opportunity for a new perspective and time to pay attention to the deeper desires for our life. In the busy-ness of our usual work or routines, it is easy to discount nudges and "divine elbowing" as distractions from our responsibilities. We are hungry – like the eunuch. How often do we "make a trip to Jerusalem" to search for the food, the Bread of Life, the "living bread" who is Jesus, the Christ? How often do we "make do" with fast food, which only serves to dampen the hunger, but doesn't really satisfy? Like signs along the highway announcing restaurants up ahead, God is always trying to get our attention! Do I notice? The signs are endless, coming in the form of a supportive friend, a challenging co-worker, a sun-lit rock or a stranger on the road who instructs us, inviting us to a deeper understanding of our soul's calling and purpose. Am I hungry enough to stop?

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