

“Text Support”

Text: Acts 8:26-40

You ever been on a computer and had it shut-down or lock-up on you? Unless you're someone who understands how computers work, it can be an unnerving experience. Fortunately, there is something out there to get you the help you need, something called “Tech Support.” Most computer companies have it – you just call a 1-800 number and speak to a technician, who then walks you through the process of getting your computer up-and-running again.

We see something similar in our First Scripture Lesson for today from Acts 8: we see someone who is in need of help – an Ethiopian eunuch. The help he needs though is not “tech support” but “*text* support,” as he experiences difficulty understanding the text of Isaiah. What we see is that the same support received by the eunuch is available to us today, and so let's turn to it now together ...

As we do, we return to our First Scripture Lesson, where we see the message of Jesus' resurrection spreading further out into the world through the preaching of a man named Philip. Philip was one of those selected earlier in Acts (ch. 6) to help the apostles in their ministry, and in this text for today we hear of how Philip brought the message of Jesus' resurrection to a eunuch from Ethiopia who was an important official in the court of the queen there. Luke says that the eunuch was returning (presumably to his homeland) after having visited the city of Jerusalem to worship, and as he was returning the eunuch was:

“... sitting in his chariot, reading the prophet Isaiah.” (v. 28)

It would've been unusual in this period for someone to have had their own copy of a biblical book, especially a foreigner like this Ethiopian eunuch. From that we can see that the eunuch was more than just a 'bit interested in the faith of Israel; perhaps he was even a

convert to it. Luke tells us that Philip was told by the Holy Spirit to go-up alongside the eunuch's chariot, and Luke writes that, when he did, he:

“... heard him (i.e., the eunuch) reading Isaiah the prophet, ...” (v. 30a)

The reason that Philip was able to *hear* the eunuch reading was that in the ancient world people usually read *aloud*. Unlike today, where we might sit on a couch for hours on end and read a book *silently to ourselves*, in the ancient world one would sit on that couch and read *out loud*. For Philip to walk-up to the chariot and listen to the eunuch read would be like you or I looking over someone's shoulder to discover what they were reading.

Upon discovering what the eunuch was reading, Luke says that Philip asked him:

“Do you understand what you are reading?” (v. 30b)

The eunuch replied:

“... how could I, unless
someone guides me?” (v. 31)

And then Luke writes that Philip joined the eunuch in his chariot and, beginning with that passage from Isaiah, told him the good news about Jesus (vs. 32-35). After that they came upon some water, and after the eunuch asked Philip if he could be baptized, Philip baptized him. Luke then writes:

“When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; and the eunuch no longer saw him, but went on his way rejoicing.” (v. 39)

It is clear that the eunuch needed help to be able to understand the Bible, and like any of us who have ever received computer help from tech support – enabling us to resume work on a computer, the eunuch rejoiced in the help he

received. The *text* support he'd received from Philip enabled him to resume his "work" in the Bible by enabling him to see Jesus.

From Philip we derive text support as well, as he helps us see a few things of note in this text ...

1) Philip shows us today that **the O.T. speaks of Christ**. We see that from the fact that Philip preached the good news of Jesus to the eunuch *using the O.T. book of Isaiah*, specifically chapter 53. Isaiah 53 is read in the Church every Good Friday, as it speaks of the suffering of Jesus for the sins of His people.

Philip used Isaiah 53 to show the Ethiopian eunuch that Jesus had suffered *for him*, paying the price for his sins with His death on the cross. We use that text from Isaiah 53 the same way today, as it shows us that Jesus suffered *for us*, paying the price *for our sins*.

2) The second thing we notice from this text is the fact that Christian faith involves **Baptism**. When we look earlier in this 8th chapter of Acts we see Philip preaching in the region of Samaria, and Luke writes that there Philip was:

“... preaching the good news about the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ, (and) *they were being baptized*, men and women alike.” (8:12)

Note that Philip was preaching and baptizing, showing a very clear connection between Jesus’ Word and Baptism.

As the Ethiopian eunuch heard the Word of Jesus from Philip, he naturally wanted to be joined to His Name – which he was when Philip baptized him. We know the same – having been joined to Jesus’ Name in the water of our Baptism, we return to that Name time and again through the Word of Absolution.

3) Another thing we notice about this text is the obvious fact that **the eunuch needed help to understand the Bible**. To fully appreciate this we need to realize that the eunuch was a capable person. I mean, Luke tells us not only that he was an important official in the court of the Ethiopian queen, but also that he:

“... was in charge of all her treasury; ...” (v. 27)

The eunuch was an intelligent man, a man who we might say “had it together.”

He was also a man who was very interested in the faith of Israel, judging (as we said earlier) from his being in possession of his own copy of Isaiah, as well as from his having just worshiped at the Jerusalem Temple. Clearly this was a man of some note, *and faith*. And yet he couldn't figure out the text of Isaiah without Philip's help; he needed text support to understand the Bible.

So do we. We need text support to understand the Bible too. You receive that

support from yours truly: your pastor. I receive it from other pastors, and biblical scholars. We all need support in the Bible as we seek to grow in God's Word about Jesus.

John tells us in today's Epistle that we are to love one another. In fact, he says that "love is from God," and that "if anyone does not love he does not know God" (1Jn. 4). To be able to love we have to be connected to the only One Who ever truly knew what love is about – the Great Lover Himself: Jesus, Who says to us in today's Gospel:

"I AM the Vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing." (John 15:4-5)

Jesus goes on to say in today's Gospel that to be connected to Him we need His Word abiding in us. That's how we bear much fruit; it's how we live the Christian life to the full; it's how we love: by being in the Word of Jesus.

And that brings us back to where we began, where we mentioned tech support for a computer when it breaks down. Due to sin, we're all broken down; we all have far too many times when we don't work right. But text support gets us back up and running again. It does that by:

Connecting us to Jesus

Reminding us of our Baptism

Explaining to us Jesus' Word.

Abiding in Jesus through His Word enables us to live together in Jesus' love. That enables us, like the Ethiopian eunuch in today's First Lesson, to go on our way "rejoicing." God grant that to us all –

– in Jesus' ✠ Name,
Amen!