

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

May 2, 2021

1st Reading; Acts 8: 26-40

Responsive Reading; Psalm 22: 25-31

Epistle Reading; 1 John 4: 7-21

Gospel Reading; John 15: 1-8

Sermon Title: How Can I?

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: Do you understand? How can I, unless someone guides me? Be guided by the Lord and guide others to the Lord.

In our 1st lesson, the disciple, Philip, is instructed to go to a remote road that goes from Jerusalem to Gaza. There Philip sees a man of obvious importance riding in a chariot.

This is not just any big shot with a big bank role. This guy is unique. The first thing that is unique about him is that he is a eunuch. God has sent Philip to a man who has been gender modified. The early bible is very critical of anyone who has modified his or her body in any way, even tattoos were strictly taboo. Secondly, he was from Ethiopia, which certainly means

that he was a black man {so much for a God that sought an Aryan race}. Thirdly this guy was a genius. He was in charge of the treasury of the Queen of Ethiopia. This guy was to Ethiopia as Joseph was to the Pharaoh in Egypt. Obviously, he was thought to be the wisest man in Ethiopia and for that matter maybe the wisest man in the world. Also, he was a convert to Judaism. With all of these accolades you might expect him to be pretty full of himself but on the contrary when asked if he understood what he was reading his answer was, “How can I, unless someone guides me?”

We all need guidance when it comes to trying to understand God. Fortunately, God gives us guidance through His word and by bestowing on us and others around us the understanding made possible by the Holy Spirit. This may come in the form of a pastor, a friend or a parent, or more likely all three.

In the Epistle taken from 1st John, John tells us that God is love and the only way to know God is to follow His example and love our neighbors. We love because God first loved us and if we love like God does then we are in God and God is in us. There is no hate in God so if there is hate in us there is no room for God in us. This does not mean that we will never be irritated by some of those that we interact with; it just means the we must not hate them and we must not return evil for evil. Easier said than done, but that is our assignment if we are going to be in

God and have the great joy of having God in us. We will do our best to meet the expectation of our Lord and Savior.

Our Psalm tells us to praise God and pass on to unborn generations how great He is.

Finally, we come to the Gospel lesson. Christ lays out for us in black and white, or maybe I should say in red letters, the humbling as well as the exhilarating picture of an impossible-to-conceive scenario of how we fit with God and Jesus in God's major plan for this life and this world and this universe.

Jesus says, "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

Are you catching the meaning of what I just read? In God's perfect plan we are not just subjects and benefactors of God's plan we are part of it. Fruit comes from the branches. You get apples off the branches of the apple tree, not the trunk of the apple tree. On the other hand, branches that are not joined to the tree just die and rot. Apples can not grow on a dead branch

and we can not bear the fruit of God if we are not alive and connected to Him. Most of the miracles we see today are done by people. Doctors, chemists, first responders and ordinary everyday people make the difference of life and death and between joy and despair. People do it but they could do nothing if there was not a loving God directing their words and moves. Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt but the burning bush told him to do it. When we pray for someone having surgery, we often ask God to guide the surgeon's hands and when we pray for ourselves, we ask God to guide us. We ask the vine to help us bear fruit worthy of God's plan.

Don't sell yourself short. God has big plans for you. Do you understand? How can I, unless someone guides me? Be guided by God, and being guided by God be one with God.

God loves you and so do I.

Hallelujah and Amen!