

F.R.A.N.

Series: The Great Invitation: What Happens when we take our call seriously
Acts 8:26-40
February 4, 2018

Let me ask you a question to begin this morning: where is God leading you? Where is God leading you? I certainly wouldn't have imagined requiring eye surgery just 3 months ago, but for some reason I don't know yet, God had a plan and led me in that direction. Maybe to teach me something? Certainly. Maybe to teach you something? Possibly. Maybe to reach someone else with the message of Jesus and His love.

Folks, as messed up as this world is right now, it is ready, as it was 2,000 years ago, to hear about Jesus and the message of the kingdom of God. And it is time for us to share it. But we have lost the ability, the tools, the courage, and even the desire to share our faith.

In the devotional book Our Daily Bread was a story about a man who was walking down the street, and saw a young man coming his way, and a strong urge came over him to talk with this person about becoming a Christian. He hesitated at first, but then he said to the total stranger, "Pardon me, but I believe God wants me to tell you how to become a Christian."¹

Following the resurrection of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit, the disciple Philip had an encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch. I'd like you to turn to page 6 in your bulletin and follow along as I read from Acts 8:26-40.

READ ACTS 8:26-40

This week and next, we are talking about The Great Invitation: What Happens when we take our call seriously. What happens when we return to who and what we are to be as disciples of Christ, and here we find a classic model to follow as we share our faith. In fact, by following these same rules that Philip uses in Acts 8, we can reach out to those unchurched, persons who do not know the Lord. Here are 5 M's.

First, The Messenger: The first reality Philip accepted was that no matter how spiritually hungry people may be, they are not going to come to Christ by themselves. **The first reality we must accept is that no matter how spiritually hungry the people and the world around us may be, they are not going to come to Christ by themselves.** They need an escort, a guide, a messenger. In fact, surveys show that 80-90% of unchurched persons would attend church is someone they knew invited them. The Great Commission of "go and make disciples"² is a mandate, not an option; a mandate, not of religious professionals, but of all believers. Every single one of us is called to "do the work of an evangelist", to be a Philip. The story of Christ's life and ministry, His crucifixion for our sakes and His resurrection from the dead cannot be discerned simply by gazing at the mountaintops or praying at a river's edge.

Christ requires our witness, the excited retelling of the story from one generation to the next, in order for the Good News of the gospel to be heard. If we are so bold to believe and declare that one man, one event, one time, one place made a difference for all eternity, **we** must be the voice, telling the story, passing the gospel and its peace along. We are the messengers.

¹ Our Daily Bread, 3/16/97

² Matthew 29:19-20

Second, The Movement: When Philip saw the Ethiopian eunuch's chariot approaching, he ran after the traveler. Philip didn't expect the Ethiopian to stop and ask him if he wanted a lift. Philip made the move.

During the reign of Oliver Cromwell, the British government began to run low on silver for coins. Lord Cromwell sent his men on an investigation of the local cathedral to see if they could find any precious metal there. After investigating, they reported, "The only silver we could find is in the statues of the saints standing in the corners." To which the radical soldier and statesman of England replied, "Good! We'll melt down the saints and put them into circulation!"

Many of us believe that unless God picks us up and plops us on some barren wilderness, with a chariot in the distance coming at us, we cannot make the first move. But we have Ethiopians all around us, at home, at school, or at work. We have Ethiopians all around us, people who are hungry for the answer to life. But you say, "I don't know anyone like that." Yes you do! We'll talk about that later.

Paul Harvey once said, "Too many Christians are no longer fishers of men but keepers of the aquarium." We need to make the first move.

Third, The Mandate: After Philip catches up to the Ethiopian chariot, he doesn't insist that the man stop so that they can have a quiet talk. Instead, he earned himself a seat aboard that fast-moving vehicle by speaking to the eunuch about that which is obviously of most immediate concern to him. The eunuch was reading from Isaiah, apparently uncertain about the words he was reading. Philip didn't begin by asking the eunuch the state of his soul or what kind of life he is living. Instead he focused on the matter squarely before this man – the words of Isaiah. "Do you understand what you are reading?"

Missionary Susie Hobert believes that one of her main responsibilities as a mother is to instill in her children a burden for their lost friends. And she has done a good job. Ten-year old Ryan was driving imaginary race cars with his friends. Several minutes later he came bounding into the house and yelled, "Mom, you've got to come quick. Isabelle wants to accept Jesus into her heart." Skeptical of the child's sudden interest in spiritual things, Susie asked, "Ryan, I thought you were playing race cars?" "We were, Mom, but our cars wrecked. The accident was real bad so I asked Isabelle if she would go to heaven if she died. She said she didn't know. I told her how she could know and she wants to ask Jesus into her heart."

We must be willing to meet people at the point of their own individual concerns and needs on their spiritual quest. The church's witness will only reach the unchurched if we run alongside them and fearlessly step into the world they live in. For some, this may mean feeding their stomachs before attempting to feed their souls. For some, this might mean offering a physical space of peace and quiet before revealing to them the peace of Christ. For some, this might mean an offering of human warmth and loving concern before sharing the joy of God's ultimate love and salvation through Christ. But we must meet them.

Fourth, The Method: Philip demonstrated the best and most effective method of evangelism: he cared. He allowed the Ethiopian to ask his own questions, giving them value, and directing the answers so that they related to him.

There are many different "methods" of evangelism, just as there are many different methods of acting, including the "method" approach. But the most important is

caring and guiding. The unchurched people in your world need to know the gospel of love, through Jesus and you the Christian.

But you say, "I can't do that. I don't know how. I can't speak the right words, say the right things, know the right way." Well, let me tell you something: you've got to remember this. First, the power to share your faith is the Holy Spirit, given by Jesus. Jesus said in John 15:4 "Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me." Second, you are the instrument. Jesus is the vine, we are the branches. Third, the instrument without the power is useless. Jesus continues in John 15:5 says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing." God is responsible for saving them, not you. You're responsible introducing them to God; God will take care of the rest.

Finally, The Message: When my sons Marty and Matt entered 2nd Grade, their teacher was a big Green Bay Packers Football fan, and both boys really got interested in Pro Football and all the teams. They could name cities and names of all the NFL teams. At the time, Marty's favorite Pro Football team was the San Francisco 49ers, and one day, he asked me, "Why are they named '49ers?" I told him that a long time ago, in 1849, gold was discovered in California, and those that went out there to find the gold were called "49ers."

There have been a lot of "gold rushes" in America history, and there have been a lot of "fool's gold rushes" as well. And it seems to me we see a parallel in our society today, except that there is a new for a "God rush." People are rushing for God, and many of them are only finding "fool's god." Counterfeit spirituality. We need to share the real truth, like Philip. Philip let the eunuch know that the real God in his own personal God rush, the only real gold in the hills and vales of his own life, was revealed in the person of Jesus, the Christ. Philip gave him the Good News.

In your notes today are 4 letters: F.R.A.N. Those letters stand for Friends, Relatives, Acquaintances, and Neighbors. What I would like for you to do right now is to think about persons you know in those categories who are unchurched, who do not go to church. I want you to write down their names, and I want everyone to do this.

Don't tell me, "I don't want to do this." If you truly believe that, then Christ is not a part of your life. John 15:2 says, "He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." If you truly believe that you do not want to share your faith, then Christ is not a part of your life, for if you know that Jesus has saved you from certain death and given you new life, and that this is available to everyone, then this is the greatest news in the history of the world.

If you were a medical researcher, and you discovered a cure for cancer or arthritis or Alzheimer's Disease or malnutrition, you would share it so that others would be saved, and it would be a crime if you did not. Jesus Christ is the greatest news in the history of the world, greater than a cure for cancer or arthritis or Alzheimer's Disease or malnutrition. So, think about people you know: friends, relatives, acquaintances, and neighbors, who do not go to church. Do that right now.

Look back over your F.R.A.N. list. Those people are the Ethiopians crossing our pathways. We need to share our faith with them.

Allow me to finish the story that I began at the beginning of this sermon. A man was walking down the street, and saw a young man coming his way, and a strong urge came over him to talk with this person about becoming a Christian. He hesitated at first, but then he said to the total stranger, "Pardon me, but I believe God wants me to tell you how to become a Christian." The young man said, "I just asked my girlfriend's mother that question, but she didn't know." The first man asked, "You mean you want to become a Christian?" The young man replied, "Yes, I do!" Hardly believing the situation, the first man asked him again and then shared the plan of salvation with him. That night the young man met Jesus as his Savior.

Some might call this a coincidence, but we saw it today in Philip and the Ethiopian. Where and to whom is God leading you?