

Philip, the Witness

St. Mark Lutheran
Three services

Pastor Ken Welsh
June 10, 2018

If you are visiting with us this morning, we are on the fifth out of six messages based on the series "Walking with Those Who Walked with Jesus" by Rev. Richard Pfeil. Past messages have been on Peter, Judas Iscariot, John, and Thomas. Copies of any of those are available on request.

We start with a "Quickie Quiz" of six questions and you can earn points. Today's quiz will be all true and false questions. The first question is worth five points. Philip's name means "lover of horses". ANSWER: That is true. The second question is worth ten points. Philip was the first disciple martyred (killed) because of his Christian faith. ANSWER: That is false, but it is close. He actually was the second disciple martyred for being a Christian, eight years after James lost his life for the Lord. The third question is worth fifteen points. Philip contributed eight months wages to help Jesus in feeding the five thousand. ANSWER: That is false. Philip had no idea how they were going to feed that many people, and he said that eight months wages would not buy enough for each one to have a bite. The fourth question is worth twenty points. Most of the information we have about Philip comes from the Gospel of Luke. ANSWER: That is false. Most of the biblical information we have about him is in the Gospel of John. The fifth question is worth twenty-five points. Philip told people that they had found the one written about by Moses and the prophets. ANSWER: That is true. The sixth question is worth thirty points. The Apostle Philip was one of seven men appointed by the church in Jerusalem to supervise the daily ministry of assistance to poor widows in the Christian community. ANSWER: That is false. That was an excellent ministry, but that was another Philip. Philip was a very common name back then and still is popular today.

Now it was the Rev. Richard Pfeil's opinion after his research that the Apostle Philip in his time as one of the Twelve, wasn't anything like the Apostle Philip later in his life. Pfeil states that later in his life multitudes came to Christ because of the power of Philip's preaching. Most of our information about Philip comes from the Gospel of John, and Rev. Pfeil puts a lot of emphasis on what we might call several particular "snapshots" of his life.

The first is John 1, verses 43-46. Jesus had decided to leave for Galilee. He happened to find Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip must have known some things about Jesus at that point because Philip found a man named Nathaniel, and note what he said to him. He said, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote-Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

Nathaniel replied to this in a sort of negative way. "Nazareth!" he said. "Can anything good come from there?" It seems that in those days Nazareth had a poor reputation in morals and religion.

Now here is where we can learn something from Philip. He did have an enthusiasm for Christ. He reached out to a friend and brought Nathaniel to the Lord. That's great. That's a good way of reaching people, beginning with your circle of friends and inviting them to come and meet Jesus. He doesn't get involved in a foolish argument about whether anything good can come out of Nazareth. He just invites him to come and see. In our day and age we can invite them to come and hear about Jesus.

May I ask how you are doing on that? I know that some of you are doing it. I don't want to make people feel uncomfortable, but I want you to ask yourself, "When was the last time I invited a child to Sunday school? When was the last time I invited someone to Vacation Bible School? When was the last time I invited someone to church so they could at least hear about Jesus? When we celebrate Christmas and Easter, do I ever invite someone to come to our church? Do I ever take a treat or small gift to some family that just moved in the area and leave some information about our church and invite them to come? If not, why not?"

Let me share what happened here last week. Someone in our fellowship, a young person, invited two other young people to come here. I spoke briefly to both of them. One has a church home. The other doesn't, and he told his friend later on that he is interested in coming back. That happens. Do not underestimate the power of God's Word. That's the main thing we can learn from Philip this morning. Philip was a witness, and we are to be witnesses. When we invite someone to come and hear about Jesus, we are being a witness.

Now Rev. Pfeil made an interesting statement after studying Philip's early life as a disciple. He said if you were to give Philip a grade, it would probably be a "C". Now why in the world would Richard Pfeil say that about Philip?

There are several reasons. First, in John, Chapter 6, a great crowd of people is following Jesus because they saw him do miraculous healings of people who were sick. Jesus and the crowd went up on a mountainside. When Jesus saw the great crowd coming toward him, he said to Philip, "Where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?" The Holy Scriptures tell us that Jesus said this only to test Philip, for Jesus already knew what he was going to do.

What did Philip say? Well, he seemed to be pretty good at math, because he figured it all out and they couldn't afford it. Philip said, "Eight months' wages would not buy enough bread for each one to have a bite!" I have to agree with Rev. Pfeil that it wasn't a very good response. Had Philip forgotten who was sitting next to him? What he should have said might have been something like this: "Lord, you have changed water into wine; you have done all kinds of miracles; you are the Son of God, so this is not a problem for you."

But before we leave this point, aren't we too often like Philip? We believe in a God who created the world and all that is in it and who can even bring people back from the dead, but we don't go to him for help in the problems in our lives. Too often we are like Philip.

Then in Chapter 12 the Greeks want to have an audience with Jesus. They came up to worship and they probably chose Philip for their request because he had a Greek name. But he didn't take them to Jesus. He went to talk with Andrew and together they went and told Jesus. Rev. Pfeil thinks this run around is strange, but there may have been a question of security here, which would explain Philip's actions.

But I agree with Rev. Pfeil that looking at Christ's words in Chapters 10 and 14 might indicate Philip earns about a "C" grade. In Chapter 10 Jesus defends his claim to be God's Son. He points out he does what his Father does. He wants them to understand that the Father is in him and he is in the Father. Then in John 14 Jesus says, "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him."

But Philip is slow to pick up on this and he probably wasn't the only one.. He said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus replied, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father."

Now why do I even mention these things? I'm not trying to make Philip look bad; we all have our shortcomings. But I mention these things because God takes people just like Philip, average, normal, not really that knowledgeable, and calls them into service. Don't let your past, or your newness to the faith, or your lack of knowledge, or lack of spiritual maturity, or what you think is a lack of talent keep you from taking part in God's ministry. There are a lot of things you can do. Think of the twelve apostles. A couple of them were leaders or gifted, but the majority of them were ordinary men, but God called them just the same and used them in tremendous ways. And in Philip's case, tradition tells us that he served God well by doing mission work in Asia Minor. One historian called him a "great light of Asia".

We can be great lights also. Believe it. I said, in one of our Advent services last year, that a Christmas tree symbolizes what Christ's Church should look like: many lights shining brightly. The power to change hearts and save souls is in God's Word, not in us. But God has called on us to deliver the message. I personally believe that there is no greater thing that you can do for God than to witness to someone or invite someone to church or to a Bible study. Let us, like Philip, take seriously our calling to be witnesses for the Lord. Amen.