

May You Be with the Force
John 15:1-8 and Acts 8:26-40
Bon Air Presbyterian Church 2 May 2021

Somewhere along the way of my life I've learned something... interesting. I've learned that if I can just keep my **eyes open...** to what's in front of me, I'm likely to **hear...** all **kinds** of things. The heavens, for instance.

*The heavens are **telling** the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork... There is no speech, nor are there words. **Yet their voice** goes out through all the earth!*

Have you heard their voice? I have. I've also heard **other** things being **said** in plain **sight**. Have you **seen...** have you **noticed...** what's coming up in the gardens and yards around us now? My last church had a garden it cultivated to provide fresh vegetables for the local food pantry. I looked at it sometimes two or three times a day. It was **incredibly** vocal. There's hardly anything as eloquent, as **telling**, as an asparagus bed... when the **plants**, hidden way down in the warming soil, start augering up toward the light, breaking through the surface, pushing out vigorous greening stalks... and **proclaiming...** to everyone with the eyes to **hear** it... the presence of not only the natural forces a-stirring those plants... but of the **foundational** Force that is working... that is always and ever at work... upon and throughout creation! A life-force, some would call it... a directing force... a kind of wisdom-in-action affecting, influencing everything. Nothing... no one... can go anywhere but where **it's taking** creation. And to have some **sense** of that... and a **will** to go **along** with that... a desire to **align** oneself with that... is rather telling in itself!

Now, **Biblical faith** has its **own take** on this... its own ways of talking about these things. Biblical faith, through its distinctive language and imagery, presents **God** as the Foundational Force... God – the Creator, the Almighty One, the Sovereign Lord, the ruler of heaven and earth. Biblical faith declares that it's God to whose will the world's peoples are bent –

God whose **choice** made Abraham the father of nations,
God who heard the cries of the Hebrew slaves,
whose **power** overwhelmed the pharaoh's,
whose law defined Israel's way of life,
whose faithfulness **established** Israel in the promised land,
whose prophets revealed Israel's failures,

whose justice required Israel to face exile...
God through whose **mercies** a remnant was preserved, and
God who, when the time was right, sent Christ to become not only
Israel's Savior, but the **world's**.

God sent Christ to be Savior of all the nations God had envisioned when he spoke to Abraham.

Biblical faith tells of God – the Alpha and the Omega... the Initiator of all and the Perfecter of all – **launching** in the beginning not **only** the creation but a **plan** for its **redemption**... a plan for eventually **uniting** all things... things in heaven and on earth... **in** Christ, **with** Christ, **through** Christ. All things. That is God's good and gracious plan. That's where God has everything heading. That's what **Biblical** faith **presents**.

And the extraordinary thing about this **for us** is that we get to **participate** in God's plan... with some **awareness** of what's going on! We get to **play** our parts in helping it unfold... **knowing** where it's heading... knowing **that** it's heading somewhere truly, truly good: There **will** be a time when **all** things are united with God in Christ – you and I included! How good is that?!

Now, I suppose you **could** be wondering what any of this has to do with the story in **Acts** about Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch. Well, you did, I suppose, **hear** in the story how remarkably active the **Force** was? Of course, instead of "**Force**" Luke used the term "**Spirit**". The Spirit of God, through an **angel**, no less, **commanded** Philip to get up and go... out to the road that goes south from Jerusalem toward Gaza – a wilderness road. **Philip** said not a **word** – he jumped up and set off. The Spirit had something planned, something for Philip to **help** God accomplish. And **whatever** it was, Philip figured he'd play his part. An **Ethiopian** official, most likely a **Gentile**, had made a long journey to Jerusalem so that he could worship God there. Was it at the **Spirit's** impulse that he'd gone? I think it's safe for us to assume it was. The Spirit was a-**stirring** in his life! **After** worshipping, the Ethiopian left to return home in his chariot. Heading down that wilderness road, he eventually passed Philip. And the Force – that is, the **Spirit** – directed Philip to go over and accompany whoever was in that chariot. And Philip did exactly **that** – no questions asked. When he **closed in** on the chariot, he heard the Ethiopian reading from the prophet Isaiah. *Do you understand what you're reading*, Philip asked? Philip – the **one** disciple of the original 12 who had a Gentile name, a Greek name – Philip was **surely** distinctively **equipped** to interpret for this Gentile what Isaiah had prophesied concerning the messiah...

whom Philip knew as his Savior, Jesus. The Spirit knew **exactly** what it was doing. And Philip was fully willing to play his part. He **played** his part. Philip **offered** his witness. He shared the **gospel**. And the Ethiopian responded! *Look, here's water – what's to prevent me from being baptized?*

(I expect I would have answered, *Well, first we've got to have a session meeting to approve your request.*)

But the Spirit was in charge **there**; and there was no stopping the Ethiopian or Philip **that** day. In short order, the blessing of baptism was bestowed; and that Ethiopian Gentile, who also was a **eunuch**, was claimed as a full-fledged member of the body of Christ... as part of God's beloved community. And with that **done**, the Spirit snatched Philip away... spiriting him off to preach the gospel to others. And the Ethiopian **eunuch** went on his way rejoicing, home to Ethiopia... where, tradition tells us, he became a **father**... the **spiritual** father of a thriving Christian Church.

As one whose way of seeing and hearing has been shaped by **Biblical faith**, I have certain convictions and hopes... that some of you might share with me. I believe:

that God **is** working out God's purposes everywhere in the creation. And they are great and saving purposes;

that Christ, through his life and his death for us all, has opened the way for us to be reconciled with God and one another... to be united in Christ; and

that the Spirit of God Christ promised his disciples is active now throughout creation... is full-on engaged... in ways we may understand and in ways we may not... is engaged in drawing people toward Christ, **into relationship** with the Savior, **toward a life** that reflects God's desires and intentions.

And if, through God's mercies and the Spirit's impulses, **we** have been given a glimpse of what God's doing... if we **have** been helped to see even a bit of what's going on... then it's **incumbent** upon us... it is necessary for us... to **place** ourselves **where** the Spirit **directs**... to **play** our part in the unfolding of God's great plan... to contribute **whatever** gifts God has given **us**... and to bear some fruit... maybe even much fruit... for glorifying God.

Friends, as surely as that force of life is even **now** causing those plants in our gardens to auger up, there is a Holy and **Redeeming Force** that is at work, at play, aflight, afoot, in 10,000 thousand places in this world... including this place... **bringing** redemption, renewal, and relationship with God. And you and I are **deeply** involved in what it's doing. **We are in deep** from now on out, until life ends – and **after** that, as well.

It is a gracious, mighty Force... a mighty gracious Force. And even those who resist and fight it will find their battles being turned to what finally serves its end... just as the **death** of Christ became a way to **life**.

It is a mighty gracious Force. And it is **determined** that **you'll** be with it! And it is determin-ing **how** God's good and loving intentions will one day be fulfilled **throughout** the creation... when there will be surprise and delight, and laughter and tears, and abundance – fruitfulness beyond **anything** we can imagine – shared among all who are one with God... in Christ, with Christ and through Christ. And there will be **doxology!** You can be **sure** of that!

Glory, glory, glory... Amen, amen, amen!