



Sixth Sunday Easter 2005

Acts 8: 5-8, 14-17 1Peter 3: 15-18 John 14: 15-21

The readings of Eastertide are about the essentials of discipleship. The fifty days of Easter are like a course in preparation for Pentecost as a sort of re-commitment day, or a confirmation of what we vowed in Baptism.

From Acts we have an example of early ministry. This time we hear about the mission to Samaria.

When we think of Samaria, we are reminded of the ancient enmity between the Jews and the Samaritans. We are also reminded of Jesus' challenge to bigotry and racism in the parable of the Good Samaritan. We also remember the call to mission of the Samaritan woman at the well.

The people of Samaria are to be part of the post resurrection outreach of the disciples. They are to hear the message to love one another; it is this love that makes one a child of God not birth, race, prestige or power.

Philip, a disciple, went to Samaria and began to proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah. There were cures and many conversions. The people were roused to fever pitch by the wonder of it all. A question arose then as it does now. What part does healing play in evangelization?

There are many preachers today who use healings, "slaying in the Spirit" as a sign of their authenticity. Does a display of personal power mean the presence of the Holy Spirit? In some claims there seems to be a display of showmanship which is at odds with the actions of Jesus. There is the complication of emotion in illness which is only beginning to be understood.

The story from Acts tells us that the gifts of God cannot be bought. We cannot use God as a sort of lucky charm to find parking places or score points over someone. From our tradition, we learn that gifts of the Spirit are for the up-building of the community. We need to discern whether such signs cast out fear, free people, or bring peace and joy. They should not bind people to a particular person or group.

People who advertise their ability to heal in the Spirit are making claims that they can control a gift that is essentially free. We need to be aware of the seductions offered by such persons. Intercessory prayer for others is not a guarantor that we can save others from pain, sickness or death. It teaches us to place our trust in God with the prayer Jesus taught us, "Not my will but thine be done."

In the Gospel Jesus says, "I will ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete, another Advocate, to be with you always, the Spirit of Truth... will instruct you... remind you"

We need the Spirit of Truth to help us mature in faith, to grow in our understanding of the requirements of discipleship.

Philip needed a visit from Peter and John to confirm his new converts. We need to stay in touch with the community and we need sound leadership as we face the demands of an ever increasing complex world.

Jesus tells us that we are not orphans. We are not helpless in the face of change, but we need each other as we search for the roads that lead to God.

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