

Easter 5B  
April 29, 2018

Grace Church, Lexington  
Fr. James

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*Acts 8:26-40*    *Psalm 22:24-30*    *I John 4:7-21*    *John 15:1-8*

## LOVED

What was a high official of the Ethiopian government doing in this wilderness area coming down from Jerusalem and heading back to his homeland? Why was he there? He was there because he considered himself a Jew. A black Jew? Come now.

Early in the millennium before Christ, the Queen of Sheba, in the then non-existent royal house of Ethiopia, visited King Solomon the son and heir of David, the progenitor of Jesus. She had heard of Solomon's wealth and wisdom. She brought such great gifts, that she augmented his wealth, and if one believes the rumors, his harem. Their son, Menalik I, became the founder of the royal house of Ethiopia. That's how some Ethiopians became Jews! That is

how the Jewish Law and the Jewish faith became indigenous in Ethiopia.

Many years after Solomon, when the kingdom was invaded and the temple raided in 587 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar of Chaldea presumably everything of value was stripped from the holy of holies. However, there is no record of the Ark of the Covenant being removed other than a passage in 2 Maccabees, which suggests that the prophet Jeremiah did so to keep it from the Chaldeans. In subsequent years it has become clear that it is at least possible that the Ark was removed in advance of Nebuchadnezzar's invasion and taken to safety. It is the Ethiopians who claim that they quietly removed it to safety to their city of Axum near the border with present day Eritrea on the Red Sea. At the time Axum was the royal and capitol city of the nation.

The intersections of Jerusalem and Ethiopia are numerous and they have been well-traveled. This

official in our Acts' lesson is merely one of many who traveled these routes. He had come to Jerusalem, presumably to celebrate Passover, explicitly to worship. For this court official of Candace, Queen of Ethiopia, in charge of her entire treasury, it was a time for retracing his genealogical roots, perhaps, certainly of tracing traditional trade and travel routes, and as he leaves and heads South toward the Red Sea, he is reading one of the most beautiful, if most dense, of the prophetic readings, that of Isaiah 53. From it we could read that this servant was born, suffered, died and was buried. It reads like the Apostles Creed and Philip did not hesitate to suggest that the prophet was describing the suffering servant, Jesus. The same holy spirit who led Philip into the wilderness and up to the carriage, had prepared the eunuch's heart for the Gospel, which he accepted and embraced in baptism. Here was a man, one who had embraced the Hebrew God, and now was led to accept his Son as

his LORD. He was the first, we presume, to take the good news back to Ethiopia and to the court of Candace. Amazing how God has prepared the world for Jesus, and he has prepared the hearts of many to become his followers. They were ready to hear that they were so loved. In John's first letter the writer is very clear that love is of God and is given to us. That is, God so loves us that 'everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Without ever saying that if such a one is seen, God is seen, there is that implication. Surely it is implied that God's love is seen in human flesh, and is meant to be.

Carlyle Marney told about an old man who was asked once, "Have you ever seen God?" He said, "No, but I have known a couple of Jesuses in my lifetime." That is what John is talking about. No one has ever seen God, but what you can see is God's love. Mark Trotter, Collected Sermons, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com)

Rosemary Brown is a highly respected minister in Tennessee. She has been featured a number of times on The Protestant Hour National Radio Broadcast. She tells a story about a little girl in her church named Mickey. Mickey is four years old. She is a precious, adorable, out-going little girl who loves to sing.

One Sunday morning, Mickey ran down to the front of the Sanctuary just before the start of the morning worship service and with great excitement, she said: "Miss Rosemary Brown, can I sing a song this morning?" Not wanting to say "no"? or to be a stumbling-block to this vivacious little girl, Rosemary said: "Of course you can." Then, Rosemary announced to the congregation that four-year-old Mickey would sing the call to worship to start the service.

Rosemary Brown picked up Mickey and stood Mickey on the front pew. She turned her around to face the now expectant and smiling group of people in church that day? And Mickey sang:

"Jesus wuvs me dis I know for da Bible tells me so. Yes, Jesus wuvs me." And then, Mickey threw her hands straight up in the air (like she had just scored a touchdown) and with a triumphant voice she said: "And, dat's dat!" And then Mickey sat down.

(Rosemary Brown, Protestant Hour Sermon, "The Apple of My Eye," p.3) James W. Moore, Collected Sermons, [www.Sermons.com](http://www.Sermons.com)

Luke's description of the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch is somewhat like that, so matter of fact, he is so ready to hear, so ready to act. The church in Ethiopia, while recognizing this early Christian presence at the Court, dates the bringing of the Christian Church to their land in the 4<sup>th</sup> century by

two Syrian boys, Edisius and Frumentius, who were shipwrecked and put to work as slaves. Gaining the trust of the emperor, eventually these two shared their faith in Jesus and the church was born. The nation was long considered the only Christian nation outside of Europe and during the Middle Ages there was a legend in Europe that a part European, part Ethiopian monarch ruled keeping the Muslims at bay, none other than the fabled Prester John. Whether or not there was a Prester John, it was the church that resisted the advance of the Muslim troops for years. When finally the Muslims took over the nation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, they were overthrown by the Christians aided by a small Portuguese force of 400 musketeers a short 15 years later.

But our story is not about the struggle of armies and alien faiths, but the power of love and its revolution in the lives of those who practice it. John wrote again, No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love

is perfected in us. That we hold today.

I like a story that illustrates the need for precise repetitive teaching. It goes like this: a person known to be devoted to honesty and a simplistic outlook on life is being questioned and evaluated on the knowledge attained. The first question asked is, how many days of the week begin with the letter 'T'? The person responds, "Two. Today and tomorrow." Which is followed by, "How many seconds are in a year?". And the reply given is, "Twelve. The second of January, the second of February...". The third question asks for another name for God. The person blurts out, "Andy. When I was little we sang a song that went, Andy walks with me, Andy talks with me, Andy tells me I am his own."

John E. Alsup, *To Be Fruitful or to Wither*

That is a round about way to get to the truth that we are loved, and that because we are loved we

may love in response. The Ethiopian eunuch  
understood this. We do too. This is our inheritance.  
It is our treasure and it is all in earthen vessels. *So be  
it.*