



SEMI-ORGANIZED LOVE Wk 5: *Church is Belonging* @pastorerichuffman @thestoryhouston www.thestory.church

Who belongs in church? I already know your knee-jerk response: *Everyone*. And you're right on the most basic level. But think about that question from the perspective of someone outside the church:

Who would your non-religious friends say really *belongs* in church? ...and who *doesn't*?

This month, we're walking through the Acts of the Apostles, the book that documents the lives of the first Christians...guys like Philip. Who was Philip? What do we know about him?

Acts 8:26-29 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Go south to the road - the desert road - that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of the Kandake (which means "queen of the Ethiopians"). This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the Book of Isaiah the prophet. The Spirit told Philip, "Go to that chariot and stay near it."

What do we know about the Ethiopian man? What role did eunuchs play in ancient kingdoms? What was he doing in Jerusalem?

Acts 8:30-35 Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. "Do you understand what you are reading?" Philip asked. "How can I," he said, "unless someone explains it to me?" So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. This is the passage of Scripture the eunuch was reading:

"He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth." The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.

Why do you think Simeon (the Ethiopian) was drawn in by Jesus' story. What did he have in common with Jesus?



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Acts 8:36-38 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

What was happening in the church at this point? Who were the first Christians? Who belonged?

When Simeon asked, "What can stand in the way of my being baptized?" there were several things Philip could have said. What were some of the rule-based, religious reasons why Simeon perhaps should not have been baptized as a Christian?

What do Philip's actions say about who belongs with Jesus?

Reflect on Romans 3:23: ...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...

How did the Christians adapt their religious understandings to the radical movement of Jesus and the Holy Spirit to include people beyond the Jewish faith?

What do you think that means for the church today? How far should we go in welcoming all people? Is there a line, and if so, where is it?