

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota
May 6, 2012

Acts 8:26-40
1 John 4:7-21
John 15:1-8
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, what do I have here? Its part of a bee's nest right? This hung high in a tree in our backyard all last summer. It finally blew down this spring. Bees/hornets/wasps do amazing construction work don't they? This nest is built out of something like paper, light weight, yet strong. It is a house capable of storing all kinds of honey and of protecting all kinds of bees.

You know how bees work right? They live in this nest at night and then during the daytime they fly out and collect honey from flowers. They then bring the honey back to use as food for their hive. That is very good for the bees. But did you know it is also very good for the flowers, plants and trees. When the bees land on a blossom, they get plant pollen on their legs. When they fly to the next plant, they bring the pollen over to that one and then the next. This "**pollination**" enables the plants to produce oxygen, to bear fruit and to help start new plants. And who needs oxygen and fruit? We do! We also like to eat the honey that bees produce.

What an amazing creation we live in. God has created this world so that everything depends upon everything else. What's good for people also needs to be good for the animals, the plants, the water and the air. We need the plants, animals, water and air and they need our help too.

When we help others, we often experience blessing ourselves. Have you ever brought food for the food shelf? Have you ever put money in a Salvation Army Christmas kettle? Have you ever tried to encourage someone who was sad? How does it feel to help someone else? God often gives us a wonderful feeling when we go out of our way to help others.

Do you think that our church is at all like a bee hive? We all gather here and share God's good gifts. Then we all scatter out into that big, wide world where God continues to care for us. And sometimes, the things that we touch or do help that world to be a better place too. That's what God wants to see happen. Do you think we can work together to make the world a little more like the way God wants it to be? Yes! Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE **“Running Alongside with the Love of Jesus”**

God sent **Philip** way out of his way in order to run alongside of an **Ethiopian eunuch**. A what? Philip was sent to find a man that he had never met before. The man was a black foreigner visiting from way down in Africa. He had come to Jerusalem to worship the God of the Jews. He was a Gentile, a non-Jew. He could never become a Jew, according to ancient Jewish writings in **Deuteronomy 23:1**, because he had been castrated. This was done so that he could serve the queen without threat to her. This Ethiopian eunuch was the queen’s treasurer. He probably had all the things that money could buy, but he may not have had a family of his own and he stood looking in from the outside of a religion that wouldn’t accept him.

Deuteronomy is one of the most ancient books in the Old Testament. By the time **Isaiah** was written, hundreds of years later, the promise is given that even eunuchs will be welcomed into God’s family (Isaiah 56:3-8.) And in our text from **Acts**, written during the time when the early Christian church was starting, God literally sends Philip looking for this Ethiopian eunuch who needs to hear about Jesus. Philip responds to God’s command and proceeds to intersect the unsuspecting man’s life. The eunuch is by now on his way home from Jerusalem and Philip runs up alongside of his fine chariot. Philip overhears the man reading aloud from that book, **Isaiah**. That’s where the conversation begins. By the time everything is said and done, by the time they’ve gotten a few miles down the road, the eunuch **hears** the good news of Jesus, **experiences** the love of God and is **baptized** as the **newest member of God’s family**.

The disciples, at first huddled in a locked room, are by now out into the world passing along the news of a risen Lord and Savior. The eunuch is touched and changed. Then he heads for home to touch others. And Philip heads on to the next opportunity to run alongside someone who needs to hear the Good News of our loving God. **Loving God?** In our second lesson from **1 John 4**, the word **love** (agape in Greek) is used **27** times in 14 verses. This is the kind of love which **means sacrificial, self-giving, caring about the well-being of the other, even the enemy...** Another key word in our 1 John text is **abide** which is used **6** times. Jesus also uses **abide 8** times in our short **Gospel text from John**. And Jesus there uses **fruit 6** times. Any time you see a word appear more than a

couple of times in a passage, it means, **“Don’t miss this!”** What are our words for today?

- **Love (27)** – taste God’s sacrificial love for you and for all people.
- **Abide (14)** – live your life in the embrace of God’s love for you and for all people.
- **Fruit (6)** – grow in God’s love and touch the lives of others with it. Let God’s love and your life make a difference in your world.

Philip ran alongside the Ethiopian eunuch with the love of Jesus.

Does that sort of thing still happen? I received a letter thanking us for sending some of our offerings to help in the ELCA battle against world hunger. Our missionaries share the good news of Jesus and they help people to learn to live well. One example jumped out for me.

“I’ve enclosed a photo for you. This is Poug Bouch, mother of seven children, in her family’s vegetable garden in Cambodia. She spent \$7 on radish seeds, and her early harvest earned \$366 for the family. Once the second radish crop is harvested, she plans to plant beans. Ms. Bouch says, ‘The new techniques really work. I can hardly believe it! Thank you so very much for teaching me to grow crops.’” Apparently someone ran alongside of her with the love of Jesus. She thinks that it was us.

Cambodia is a long ways away. Canada is closer. Last week **Steve Wilson**, from our parish, emailed me about a huge fire at a saw mill in Prince George, British Columbia. The mill was destroyed and many workers were injured. Steve’s lumber company gets some of their product from those folks. He writes, **“Keep these folks in your prayers please. We don’t know them personally but we do get a lot of their material. My heart aches for them and their families. Can’t imagine the horror.”** Is Steve’s request for prayer for strangers something like running alongside with the love of Jesus?

Can Jesus’ love run closer? **Rose Reich** is having surgery here in Aitkin on Monday. I wouldn’t have known that had not **Karen**, Rose’s co-worker, called and alerted me. That enabled me to visit and offer support and prayer. That will enable all of us to lift Rose up in prayer. Karen came alongside of Rose with the love of Jesus.

Friday night I attended the **Mystery Dinner Theater** put on by our **Journey Youth** and their adult leaders. They have been doing some amazing

things as they prepare to **head out of this gathering place** to experience the blessing of a national youth assembly and to do **compassionate mission work there** in New Orleans. Those **adult leaders are running alongside** of extremely busy kids to share the love of Jesus. Those kids are also being a blessing to their leaders and to this whole church and soon even to the world beyond. Friday night our kids celebrated that they have now raised enough money to move forward with their **Journey Together**. Thanks be to God and to all those who are running alongside of them.

We also have a few kids signed up to go to **Bible Camp** this summer. At the time of these kids' baptisms this congregation promised to assist their parents in raising them in the faith. We promised to help teach them that **Jesus loves them even more than Mom and Dad do**. This is a chance for us to bear some fruit. It costs close to **\$400** for a week of camp. Young families don't often have lots of money. Our church is committed to providing **\$100** camperships to lower the expense to families. If you want to help with that, write a check for any amount and mark it "**camperships**." A bunch of our folks were up getting camp ready just yesterday. Together we are running alongside these kids and their families with the love of Jesus.

Thursday night our **Vacation Bible School** leaders and helpers are gathering to continue preparation for this summer's amazing event. Every year it takes dozens of caring adults and teens to run alongside the little people of this community with the love of Jesus. And kids, leaders, helpers, families and the entire church will once again be blessed by what God brings about among us.

God sent Philip out of his way in order to find the Ethiopian eunuch. Does God still do that sort of thing? **Loren and Diane Rachey**, just now joining First Lutheran, told me that April was **National Donor Month**. Diane has received two donated kidneys over the years. The first one lasted her for 23 years before needing to be replaced. Diane is also in recovery from cancer for the past 6 years. Diane and Loren are so thankful that someone ran alongside of them with the love of Jesus that came in the form of two kidneys. **Does it say "Donor" on your driver's license?**

Is there some **hungry person** out there on the edge of your life who needs some food? Is there some **lonely person** who needs your friendship? Is there some **doubtful person** who needs to clearly see the love,

acceptance, and compassion that Jesus carried through the cross, grave and gate of death to give to them? Is there some person **looking in from the outside** and wondering what this "**God stuff**" is all about? Can you run alongside them with the love of Jesus?

This weekend we have the privilege of participating in the baptism of a couple of beautiful, little ones – **Harper Lee Hartman** and **Madden Ronald Dotzler**. As God adopts them into God's family, we make some promises. In a nutshell, we promise to **run alongside of them and their families with the love of Jesus**. **God will be running there with us and God will bless us all**. Thanks be to God! Amen.