

“HEART AND HEAD”
A Sermon Preached at
FIRST UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
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(transcribed from audio file)

Our scripture reading today is from the book of Acts 8:26-40.

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south, to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

*“Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.
In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth.”*

The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?” Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more and

went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea. NRSVue

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Today's passage is about Philip, but I'd like to begin by telling you a little story about someone else. A different Philip – Phil Rosenthal. I don't know how many of you know who Phil is. He was one of the creators of Everybody Loves Raymond and kind of the creative genius behind that TV series and now he is the star of this Netflix series called Somebody Feed Phil.

Somebody Feed Phil is basically a show about a guy who just travels the world, tries all sorts of foods in any particular city that he goes to, makes all these friends along the way – restaurant owners or people who are serving in the shops or people he meets on the street and then at the end of each episode they all gather together at one table. All these friends that he has made along that journey and they share a meal together and they laugh, and they just experience joy.

A little over a week ago Phil came to St. Louis and so, I didn't just buy tickets to go see this guy, I bought the VIP package so we would get to meet and greet him afterwards. It didn't really make any sense because people said to me, "Well what's he going to do if the show is traveling and is he going to eat food on stage?" and I said, "I really have no idea what the show is going to be."

So, we went just based on a feeling and we get there and there are just two lounge chairs sitting up on the stage. The first half of it was just him and a host and they were just talking. They were talking about the show. They were talking about some of the lessons learned along the way and how it got started and all these different aspects of it. Then the second half of the show was just Q and A from the audience. They had four microphones set up around the theatre. There were over 2,000 people came to see this guy, having no idea what he was going to do. People just got up and started asking questions.

Usually it started with them telling him how meaningful his show was, that was filled with joy, how much it meant to them. So, as you can imagine I was one of the first people up to the microphone. I mean come on people. Someone put a microphone up and I'm third generation only child. You know, it's like catnip. You know. I had to go.

I got up there and when it was my turn at the mic, I felt a little nervous about this and I just started blahhhh. It just started coming out. I said, "I'm a pastor. My

wife,” I pointed to my lovely wife. “My wife is a clinical psychologist and sometimes our days are really hard. And some days we are just really worn out and we watch your show on those days and it just fills our cup and brings us such joy. And what I want to know is, what do you do when you’re having a tough day? What do you do to fill your cup, to fill your life with joy?”

He stood up and he looked at me and he motioned me to come forward. Once again. Third generation, only child and he’s inviting me toward the stage. Absolutely! I’m in! I walk up to the edge of the stage. He gets down on one knee at the edge of the stage, and he reached out his hand and he shakes my hand and he said, “I travel around and I meet kind people like you who are trying to make a difference in the world and that fills my cup.”

I mean ... I just went, “God bless you.” And I meant that.

As I went back to my seat, I was like that felt surreal. At first I thought, you know, it’s not like a world famous person, but in our household, Phil is pretty famous, and I thought, is it because I met a famous person on TV? I’ve actually had a chance, in my life, several times to meet famous people, to meet people who have been on TV or in movies, and there was something different about this though. It wasn’t that feeling.

You know that feeling, like you are with someone and it just seems like they don’t belong there. If you run into your teacher at the supermarket, you know? You don’t belong here. That just what happens when you’re around famous people. Ahh, you don’t seem like you should be outside of that television. But it wasn’t that. What is this feeling?

And then I thought, it’s like when I was a kid and I went to see Santa Claus. Yeah! It felt like such goodness and joy. It made no sense to buy tickets to go see a guy who I had no idea what he was going to do or buy the VIP package for later, but there was something – there was a feeling there that I acted upon.

In our Bible passage today, we have characters that are acting on feelings, but also acting with their head and the experience of coming of faith. Philip has received a message, you know, and I don’t know how explicit it was but it’s gotta be more on faith than on thought that he goes out. And he goes out onto a wilderness road.

Now if you don’t know what a wilderness road is, that’s a road with no streetlights. There is no 7-Eleven. There’s no Casey’s. You’re not getting a good Pizza out there. It’s nowhere. He’s out in the middle of nowhere.

Tells him to go out on this nowhere road and just out of that faithful feeling, Philip goes out there and encounters this caravan with this severe out-of-towner, way out-of-towner and as he gets closer, he hears him reading from the prophet Isaiah. He gets in the carriage with the guy. Again, not really knowing what was happening, but feeling something. And when he gets in, he's like, "Do you understand what you are reading?"

And the guys like, "How can I understand it unless somebody explains it to me."

Then Philip's brain kicks in. "I know this. I can do this." And with the head part of his faith, he speaks of the knowledge that he has received over time and how he's been discipled and how he's been poured into by other people. And he explains what this prophet is speaking about.

It's obvious that this Ethiopian eunuch's curiosity was into these scriptures even though he didn't understand it and he was moved by that. And then it's a matter of like, "Look there's water. How about we just have a baptism? What's to keep us from having a baptism?"

And Philip said, "Well we have to meet with the Session first." No. No. No. It didn't happen that way cause Philip wasn't Presbyterian, but it still is a little bit overly spontaneous, I think, for Philip's way of doing things.

But there's the moment and maybe it doesn't make head sense in that moment, but it makes heart sense, so let's go with it and it happens, and this is how this Ethiopian eunuch comes into faith.

We come into our faith, sometimes out of our head and sometimes out of our hearts. God made each of you as some weird little mixture of head and heart faith. Some of you are a lot more head faith. Some of you just don't read your Bible, some of you read theology. Ugh. But you love it. You love the learning. You want to read books that dive into the deeper stuff. You know, the nooks and crannies of it. You like going into a Sunday School class and just having all that stuff extracted out of the text and learning about all that and that fills your faith cup.

Some of you are like – no thank you! You feel it. For you, maybe some of the biggest moments of the service is just being surrounded and swallowed up in the beautiful sound of our choir. Of praise to God being lifted up through those voices and through that music. Or maybe it's through the prayers. You need to feel it. And maybe something that is spoken out of a pastor's mouth, helps with that too, but you need to feel it more than you need to think it. That's how your faith works.

And you want to know which one of you is wrong? Neither one. You're all just a little bit of a mix of each but sometimes we can get to the point where we maybe think we're doing it wrong because we're a little bit different than that person next to us or that person we really respect in the faith.

You all have those Prayer Cards from our siblings in Christ from Thailand. I wonder if any of you have Ye or Quan. Go ahead and look to see if you have Ye or Quan. Let's see. Who has Ye? Raise your hand if you have Ye. Several of you have Ye. How many of you have Quan?

Ye and Quan are a hoot. These two ladies run a restaurant along the side of the road out there in non-Thai District. It's called 3-4. And I said, "why is it called 3-4?" and they said, "you know, 3,4 go". I still didn't understand, but that must be a thing people do there. You know, 3,4 go. Okay. So, it's called 3-4 and it's this little roadside...it's so good. For those of you who eat Thai food, it's the best pot seuss I've ever had in my life. It's amazing food, alright? And they cook for all the church stuff. Oh, it's so good.

When it comes to the part of the faith community, Ye and also for the restaurant business, Ye's the thinker. She likes studying the Bible. She actually comes up and helps lead worship sometimes. Ye is the thinker in that, the detail person.

And Quan, it's all about the heart for her. She doesn't like being up in front of things, but just likes what it feels like. I found this out because I had an opportunity to sit next to Quan at one of those meals and she doesn't speak much English at all and my Thai is lacking in a lot of ways, but we had a real slow conversation with my iPhone and Google translator sitting between us and we went back and forth and what I found out over a long period of time, cause it takes a while, was that she was part of that faith community because she just felt something every time she was there. She felt love. She felt something that was real to her. And it made her want to know more about God, but not know like here in the head, but know as in experiencing.

And the two of them together make a fabulous roadside restaurant. And the two of them together make a fabulous couple of faithful people in that congregation. It's because there is a bit of that head and there's a bit of that heart and I think we need a bit of that too within our own lives of faith.

The full experience of what we can have in our relationship with God, a lot of it can come from the head and believe you me I'm a head faith kind of guy. I want it all to make sense. I want to know the things. I know I'm a big sap up here and so you

all might think I'm more like a feely kind of faith person, but really more head. I'm convinced that some of you have this over, under bet about how many Sundays before Rob cries again. It's 3.5 just so you know. That's the going odds, but although I am a kind of emotional guy, but in my faith it's head. It's gotta make sense up here. I gotta understand it.

But I know there is something for me to receive when I let the heart part flow into that relationship with God. I know that.

So, I'm inviting you to consider where you are on that head to heart spectrum and to realize that it's not a choice and no one is wrong and no one is right, but there might be something for you to explore for you to know, for you to experience by seeing what is on the other side of that. Cause there is a fullness in our faith and while you might feel a lot of things about your faith, imagine how much richer it could be if you could know a few more things about your faith and bring the richness and the knowledge that we've been digging around for 2,000 years since Jesus walked among us.

For those of you who are all up here and reading 10,000 books about your faith, imagine if you could throw yourself into a situation of experiencing it, of feeling it, of just letting faith happen around you.

There's a fullness that God has in humanity, a fullness of the glory of God that's been revealed and when we isolate ourselves so much and we divide ourselves up so much, we lose some of that.

Part of the interview with Phil at that event I went to, they asked about what's the show really about. And he said, "It's not about travel and it's not about food. There's a lot of thought that went into this show because what it's about is his fervent belief that in a world with so much division and conflict that one of the greatest remedies for that is to travel. Is to go places. Is to meet new people. That it's hard to hold on to such division and hatred and conflict when you realize there are so many different sorts of people out there other than you. You see even in a goof ball show about a guy who seems to giggle and show delight in just eating a good donut, traveling around the world, there's a little bit of head and little bit of heart and in your life of faith, your development, the cure for the division you might feel there's probably a little bit of head solution and a little bit of a heart and it's within the glory of God.

Embrace the fullness of faith that you have and let God be glorified by your life.

Halleluiah and Amen.