Today’s story of Phillip and the Eunuch is a great distraction from the conflict, trials, and persecutions that has been the focus over the last few days. In fact, it is a delightful story. And our imagination can run wild as it is read. The angel speaks to Phillip. He obeys He meets with a Eunuch, a high-ranking court official of Candace, the queen of Ethiopia, Phillip catching up with him, running alongside the chariot hearing the Eunuch read, Phillip getting into the Chariot, interpreting scripture for him and finally baptizing him. This is classic Luke.

This is one of those rare times when someone from the higher echelons of society is converted. Who was he? He is a eunuch. What is that? Check your dictionary. This is not a biology class. Some are born eunuchs, and some were forced and other subjected themselves to procedures that made them eunuchs.

It was common for eunuchs to be high-ranking and trusted officials in a royal palace, especially around the king’s wives or around the queen. It was way to avoid the “MeToo” movement in ancient times. They may have been high-ranking, but socially, they were shunned and perhaps even ridiculed. Here is a case of the gospel reaching someone socially underprivileged.

In today’s story, the details around the eunuch’s chariot says it all. He is a very high ranking royal official. The chariot has a driver (today and chauffeur driven car) , it has room for someone to relax, to read a scroll and to entertain a guest. But the best thing is that he hears and believes the message about Jesus. Besides knowing his profession, we do not know if he was to be a Jewish convert or a Gentile Christian.

How did Phillip know what he was reading? Reading aloud was a very common practice. In fact, reading quietly was considered strange. Augustine about Ambrose…

There are ample reasons to believe that this passage gives some basic instruction about the existing practice of baptism. Now here is a homework for all of you. Pick up your bibles and check what your bible says when it comes to Act 8:37. Most probably you will see an \* or if you own a study bible, you will see a footnote. But verse 37 itself says nothing. This is because the Western texts add the demand from Philip for faith, which, may or not be there in the original text. When the Eunuch asked Phillip about what prevents him from getting baptized, vs 37 should say, “And Phillip said, “If you believe with all your heart you may.” And he said in reply, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”” And then vs 38 makes perfect sense: “Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water, and he baptized him.”

What is the larger picture of the story? Luke is progressing in the mission of the spread of the gospel as Jesus entrusted to his apostles – from Samaria, Judea, and to the ends of the world. Phillip has spread the gospel to Samaria. Now he works throughout the territory of Judea and up to the coast of Caesarea.

Did you notice the end of the passage? The moment the Eunuch is baptized, the spirit of the Lord snatched Phillip away… but the Eunuch continued on his way rejoicing. Does this remind you of another passage in the gospel of Luke? The disciples on the road to Emmaus.

But here is the main message of the story – the mission of the gospel is not the work of human planning. It is the spirit that leads. God is in charge. Human beings are always shown catching up with God’s work. The angel led Phillip to the Eunuch, the Holy Spirit lead Phillip to catch up with the Eunuch’s chariot, the Holy Spirit took Phillip away from the site, the Holy Spirit put joy in the heart of the Eunuch. God is leading the Church and we are always trying to catch up.

God moved in Samaria, God moved among the Samaritans, an Ethiopian eunuch, (the Gentiles will be another story). In this God moved among the marginalized people of the times.

Luke’s gospel and the Acts is a book for the marginalized people. The Holy Spirit moves among the marginalized people. In today’s reading we have a man, who because of his sexual condition did not enjoy the full privileges of society. But he is portrayed as deeply pious: going on a pilgrimage, reading the prophet, eager to understand its meaning, responsive to the message of Jesus. Even he is being called to be one among God’s restored people. Let us not put limits on who God calls and among whom the Spirit moves. Those we consider worthy and those we treat as outcasts, unprivileged, sometimes because of their sexual condition or orientations – what if the Holy Spirit moves among them? Who are we to determine where the Spirit moves?

Practical implications. Let God be God and Let People be People.