

*Well, it's amazing to stand here again – but I feel very much at home!
It's wonderful to see so many familiar faces –
and so many new ones too!*

Thank-you, Christine, for inviting me to preach today -
not least because this reading about Philip and the Ethiopian is one of my
favourites –

It's a wonderfully dramatic account –
there's lots of activity, lots of direct speech, lots of pace.....

In fact, it'd make a great film –

I can just picture the superb desert setting,
the horse-drawn chariot, the sumptuously-dressed African and the
wandering preacher...
leading up to the grand finale of the baptism in a pool of water

But even though this is a dazzling story,
it's also a sequence that many of us will be able to identify with –
What happens here mirrors the experiences that many of us have had –
including Peter and myself – and Tabby.

Let's start with the first word that's actually spoken – to Philip –
it's the word, **“GO”**.

God has a habit of saying 'GO' –

a little word with very big consequences –

We see people throughout the Bible told to GO somewhere new –
to MOVE – so that God's will can be done.

I suspect that most of the Christians here today have been told to GO –
to MOVE somewhere different – (for a little time or a long time) –
so that God can work.....

We first met Tabby when she'd not long moved from India to Europe.
She's had a few moves of house since then (!) and of course the big move
from Bavaria to England....

Peter and I have got our own 'moving' story – moves to lots of different
places in England – then the move to Munich – which was quite
complicated!–

and at Christmas 2007, the move back to our family home.

I don't think any of those moves have been *easy*
A move is always a challenge.

And every move to a new place means a move to a new church –
sometimes that's harder than finding somewhere to live.
We had a wonderful welcome when we returned to our 'home' church –
but we're still not sure where we should be –
We may be called to 'go' – to move to another church family.....

God's people have to be open to the call to go –
to move from where we may be feeling quite settled....

When Philip is told to go south to the desert road, he's in town.
He's talking to crowds of people – it's all going really well -
why would he waste his time moving out into the wilds?!?

Sometimes a call to move may feel like that for us -
Why would we go there?! – but if it's God's call – there'll be a reason.

The reason for Philip moving to the desert soon becomes crystal clear –
Jesus is first of all going to change this one man in the chariot –
and then, through him, change countless lives on the African continent.

And Philip isn't the only one on the move.
The African treasurer himself has travelled a fair way from home
– up to the city of Jerusalem to worship.
He's on his way back when Philip comes along.
If the African had just stayed at home, and not gone anywhere,
he would never have met Philip and his life would never have been
changed....

So – we may well be called to make a MOVE as we seek to do God's
will.
And we have to be prepared for that – whether it's a move for just a little
while or for years...

So we start with a move.
Then there's another 'm' – a MEETING.

Philip gets to the desert road and sees this horse-drawn chariot – going
along steadily at not much faster than walking pace – so he jogs over and
walks fast alongside to speak to the African.

I don't think Philip knew what he was going to say until he got there – although I'm sure he prayed!
When he gets within earshot of the chariot, he can hear this man reading from the Scriptures! Well! - what could be easier than to start a conversation about what the words mean....
God has gone ahead of Philip and led him to meet the right person at the right time.

We may find it quite daunting and difficult to talk to people we don't know – especially about our faith. But we may well find that we have a similar experience to Philip....

Perhaps we're worried about talking to someone about God – or just about church – and so we pray about it, hoping God won't want us to do anything – and then we suddenly find ourselves in a situation where God has gone before –
we get asked a question about our beliefs – or what we do on Sundays – and we know that this is the meeting God wants us to have – a meeting with the right person at the right time....

Peace Church is a great example of a church that often grows simply through people meeting each other – on the U-Bahn; at the asylum-seekers' home, in the hallway of the house where we live, over coffee at work.....

As St John says, God loves people! and he wants us to love people too! – so it's not surprising that God often works just by people meeting each other

I think I've lost count of the number of people I met here at Peace Church! – there were so many meetings – by the door, down in the coffee room, round the council table upstairs...
It's a shame we often think of 'meetings' as just council meetings - or meeting for worship (like this) –
God's meetings are all our meetings with other people :-
Christians, non-Christians, neighbours, colleagues, shop assistants-
.. and all our meetings with each other, formal and informal.....

I'm sure both Philip and the African remembered this meeting all their lives – it turned out to be absolutely crucial, because it led to faith.

Let's thank God today for those people we've met who led us to faith, who've led us to baptism -

And let's celebrate the fact that MEETING people –
and meeting with people – is central to our life as believers.

These two men moved – and then met.
So, it won't surprise you to go on to another M! –
As God's people, we may have to get moving -
We will definitely be meeting –

but we won't get very far without God's MESSAGE.

This poor African was struggling to make head or tail of Isaiah – I expect
lots of us can sympathise with that!
He knew there was a message in what he was reading – an important
message – but he couldn't even tell who was being talked about –
how could he, with no-one to explain it? – no bible group leaders? no
footnotes?

So, having met him, and having understood what the problem is,
Philip can explain that this passage is all about Jesus –
He explains the Good News – the gospel message.

In some churches, the teaching – the sermon – is called 'the message'.
The message is what God wants to say – what God wants us to hear and
understand...
We will only get the message by learning more about God's Word and
by finding out more of what it means....

One of my great pleasures here at Peace Church was being entrusted with
guiding Tabby through her lay preacher's course...
That entailed lots of work to understand God's message –
and to learn better and better ways of explaining it

This service started with a baptism and a blessing –
the meeting of Philip and the Ethiopian *ends* with a baptism and a
blessing.....

Philip's done a good job:
he's moved to the right place; he's met the right person;
he's explained the gospel message – and he's clearly explained all about
baptism and the way you use water.

The Ethiopian sees a pool not far from the road and says
"Look – here's water. Why shouldn't I be baptised?"

Just from these words, we can tell what's gone on between Philip and the man.

The African hasn't just been interested and entertained by Philip – he hasn't just heard the message and understood it –

There's more : he wants to accept the message for himself.

He is ready to MAKE a commitment. (x2)

Every adult Baptism and every Confirmation-of-baptism-promises is about making a commitment, declaring the priority of God in our lives. That's why every baptism is so important – and such a celebration – as it is here for the African.

He comes up out of the water - Philip disappears – *on the move to his next meetings!* – and the African continues on his way– but now instead of puzzling – he's rejoicing!

And so the cycle of M's starts all over again – he moves – back home –
he meets – the Queen Mother he works for,
friends and colleagues
He passes on the message of Jesus
and He continues to make good his commitment to follow Christ....

Perhaps it's a cycle we recognise in our own lives –

moving somewhere

meeting people

hearing and understanding God's message

and making a commitment of our own.

moving – meeting – messaging – making a commitment

And we'll go on doing these same things :

I hope there aren't too many moves for us!– but we can trust God for that.
I hope we can all enjoy meeting others – and meeting together for worship.

I hope we keep on hearing, understanding and sharing God's message
and I hope we can all make that commitment to believe and to serve God.

That's a commitment not just for a service of baptism and blessing,
but for every day of our lives. Amen.

Let us pray

Loving and Almighty God

Thank-you for the way you have led each one of us to this place at this time.

We pray for your guidance throughout our lives : may we know clearly when and where we should move.

We pray for your inspiration and love for all our meetings with other people.

We pray for your teaching, that we may hear your message clearly and always go on learning.

If we are unsure in our faith, lead us gently to the point of making a commitment

and enable us all to make good our commitment to you, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

For Jesus' sake

Amen.