

Larry R. Benfield
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Two thousand years is a long time. Almost nothing that was built that long ago remains. I hate to tell you this, but as much as we might worry about our own legacies as we get older, out of all the people who lived back then, the names of those remembered from that era is probably in the dozens at best, and not that much better even for five or six hundred years ago. Go make your own list of the names you remember from the people who lived two millennia ago. It is a time so distant as to be almost incomprehensible.

Given that reality, I am continually amazed at how fresh and relevant Holy Scripture remains. Today's reading from the Book of Acts was written about 1950 years ago and involves people and activities whose world was so different from our own. A court eunuch. A queen of what might have been a Nubian kingdom. Chariots in the desert for transportation. Or to encompass broader themes of Scripture as contained in our New Testament, first century stories of resurrection appearances in a world totally different from the scientific world in which we live. What could be more incomprehensible to modern ears?

As many of you have heard me say in sermons around this state, we will see Jesus. And what we heard today from the book of Acts is as good a story of how it happens as are any of the traditional resurrection appearances that we have heard read to us in these last few weeks since Easter Day. Here is what I mean.

The story from Acts does not tell us directly that Philip sees Jesus, but his experience is consonant with how we might see Jesus in our own age two millennia later. Philip gets out of his house and heads into the wilderness. He runs toward the stranger, not waiting for the stranger to come to him. He discovers something holy in that stranger, that is, he discovers God already at work in this court official. Philip responds to the eunuch's deepest desires. And then he finds himself taken to a new place. It is a resurrection appearance for Philip. In the act of baptizing someone, he sees Jesus; he proclaims where the resurrected body of Christ will be seen. And then it is on to some new place to proclaim that same good news to the next stranger in whom God is already at work.

Yes, Holy Scripture remains alive, its challenges as relevant and as fresh as ever. Be called away from where we feel comfortable. Go into the wilderness, those liminal places. Find someone whose life we have not previously understood. Share good news. And in the process find ourselves taken to a new place.

The next sentence you will hear from me might cause some of you to worry that you came to the wrong church this morning, but not for the reason that most people in this room would expect, so here goes. This dear old Episcopal Church has a future if it is willing to be scriptural.

You live in northwest Arkansas. You know better than I what people almost always mean when they say a church is scriptural, or in the case of The Episcopal Church, what they mean when they say that it's not. It involves how Holy Scripture is lived out in the life of the congregation, and it is usually expressed in that phrase "a Bible-believing church." Let's be

honest; everyone interprets Scripture, even the most diehard biblical literalist. What I have observed is that being scriptural usually means interpreting scripture in some way that holds on to the status quo. After all, we are all more comfortable with what we know than with what we don't know, and that is a human condition more universal than Christianity. I have also observed that behind the feeling of comfort with that which is known is fear of the unknown. We fear what we do not understand or where we have not been or what we have not seen. I use the word "we," not "they," because we all love the status quo when we get uncomfortable or afraid or complacent. From my own life, I know that liberals can be just as literal as conservatives. In that vein, I have finally come to the conclusion that the ongoing, often-overlooked challenge for the church is continually to convert us who are already on the inside.

Now, back to my contention that this church has a future if we are willing to be scriptural. If we want to be scriptural as far as the book of Acts is concerned, if we want to be bible-believing, which in the Christian use of the word "belief" means bible-trusting, then we are going to trust the truth of the biblical witness that when we make the choice to stand on the edge of the wilderness, that when we are focused on others and not on ourselves, that when we are ready to admit that we can see God as already active in the lives of strangers and even our enemies, then we are going to find ourselves in a new place. Then we are going to see Jesus. Then we are going to understand resurrection.

One of our assumptions in the Episcopal Church has been that if people only knew about us, they would likely be eager to become one of us. There is truth in it. It is a message that I continue to proclaim, and it is the story of so many adults who come to our church and like it so much as to be confirmed. I like to say that among the twenty-somethings, their simultaneous desire for ancient worship and modern intellectual honesty makes us the perfect home for them. We can become their good news.

But today's lesson is about Philip, an insider in the early church. Today's lesson is thus about you and me. How do we experience resurrection? The writer of this lesson is on to something when he says that Philip finds himself in a new place, in Azotus, after his encounter with a stranger. We need to hear it with some seriousness; it is no throw away line. When we encounter the stranger who is hungry for good news we are changed.

That is my hope for the church in Arkansas. How will we be changed by our encounters with people not quite like us? How can we see God already at work in our political enemies, for example? When will we become so scriptural that we will run toward people rather than waiting for them to come to us? For a long time we have done a good job in making Episcopalians out of people who come in our doors. When will we see that we are being made more authentically Christian by them? When will we see Jesus?

Let's take it one step further. Sometimes strangers come not only as people. The stranger can take many forms. There is the stranger called illness for someone who has always known health. There is the stranger called divorce for someone who has been married for a long time. There is the stranger called financial insecurity for someone who has lost a job. They are all frightening. They are strangers we would rather not face. Resurrection is to encounter any such stranger, undergo the death of our old comfortableness, and realize that we can be alive in a new place.

To be scriptural is to be a church that is willing no longer to remain comfortable, but rather to journey wherever it is that God is already present but we have not yet seen that truth. To be scriptural is to walk up unafraid to that which once seemed so strange. To be scriptural is to be willing to be taken to a new place, not hold on for dear life to an old one. To be scriptural is to start looking for Jesus now in Walmarts and shop floors, in classrooms and legislatures, in the hard places in our own lives. To be scriptural is to take some two thousand year old stories and decide that they will change us as much as they did to the first people whose lives were turned upside down when they witnessed the resurrected Christ walking in their midst. If we live into this truth, then this old church indeed has a future. Amen.