The first thing we need to do today is a little housekeeping in terms of Philips in the New Testament. And the reason we need to do that is because here on the fifth Sunday of Easter we have the story of one of those Philips. This Philip is generally known as Philip the Deacon or Philip the Evangelist, but the important thing to remember is he is a different person from Philip the Apostle who was one of the twelve disciples. So, with that out of the way let’s get to this story of Philip the Evangelist and the Ethiopian Eunuch, which kind of sounds like a really bad children’s book.

The story begins with some divine intervention. Philip is sitting around when an angel comes to him and says, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” Philip obeys and encounters a eunuch who was “a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury.” I am guessing his job would sort of be the equivalent of Secretary of the Treasury, except I assume he issued much less debt. When Philip encounters him, the Ethiopian Eunuch is reading from chapter 53 of Isaiah, which is often called the suffering servant chapter and is taken as a prophecy of what Jesus would suffer. So, the setup is about as good as it can get for a guy named Philip the Evangelist. And Philip does not disappoint. He proclaims the good news about Jesus Christ and the Ethiopian Eunuch asks to be baptized. He is baptized and then Philip disappears. And this is one of those stories where it is easy to put some distance between us and what happened because the circumstances of the story are probably not going to be repeated in the course of our day to day lives. However, while we do not regularly run into Ethiopian Eunuchs reading from Isaiah, the thing that sounds most foreign, at least to my ears is that someone would be so eager to want to understand the Christian message. For it seems in our current era the most common reaction among non-Christians to the Gospel message is either indifference or hostility. I have never told a non-believer that I am a priest and they replied by saying, “Oh please explain the Christian message to me so that I may understand.” I generally get one of three reactions. I might get a shrug; they might express some mild interest or they might explain the awesome new religion that they have made up. And so, I think the challenge for us is how to be like Philip, eager to follow where God leads and eager to pronounce the Gospel message, in a world that is not really interested.

There is an acronym known as ABC which stands for anything but Christian. It is used to describe the reality of our modern age at least in the western world. What is meant by this term is that people are willing to explore a whole host of spiritual practices as long as they are not seen as tainted by the Christian message. Or at least what it is they perceive to be the Christian message. And so, what do we do in a society that is simply not interested in what it is we have to offer? A society where we know there is a very high probability of rejection if we were to tell someone about the Christian faith. In such an environment is simply sharing the message enough? That is, is God interested in results or is He good with handing out participation trophies for our efforts? In what we see from Philip this morning it all worked out rather grand. Philip shows up, gives a little Bible study and the Ethiopian Eunuch is baptized. But as all of you know this is not usually the case. So, what are we to do? What are God’s expectations of us in terms of evangelism? Well, here is my answer. But just as a quick warning it will take a minute to get there because I need to start with a little caveat or confession or something like that.

To reach my conclusion I am going to be using what is generally known as an argument from silence. First let me explain the term. An argument from silence, at least in a Biblical sense is when people will argue for something in Christianity and their justification for that particular thing is that nowhere in the Bible is it said that it did not happen or is prohibited. If the Bible is silent then we can say it happened. But that sort of reasoning tends to create more problems than it solves. For example, using this line of reasoning I could say that Jesus and his disciples sometimes drove around in a van and solved mysteries because nowhere in the Gospels does it say that they did not. And that is a problem. However, I do think that we can occasionally dip into the silence argument but only for very minor things. And today is one of those days. Today we have an incredible success from Philip but I am guessing that even though the Acts of the Apostles record no failures on his part, I think it is safe to say that he probably had a few. Partly I say this because he is mortal and like the rest of us, he would have good and bad days. The other reason I say this is borne out by statistics. The early church was very small. For example, the church in Rome in the year 56 AD had somewhere around one hundred people or was roughly the size of St. John Chrysostom. If Philip was making just one convert every day, he would almost quadruple the size of the Roman church every year. Now I am very pro-Philip but I doubt he had that rate of success. And I go through all of this to suggest that the story of Philip is most likely not one of going from triumph to triumph but is probably more up and down like what we experience in everyday life. And God understands this. So, I think what God asks is not success, but is rather for us to be good Christians and embrace the message and share it.

A few years ago, I made the somewhat depressing observation that I might be a better evangelist for Costco than I am for the Christian Church. I noticed this because I went through a stage where I took several people, who were unfamiliar with the wonders of this warehouse store, and showed them around. Some of these individuals were so impressed that they joined. Now I get no kickbacks from Costco, I just really like it and so it was kind of natural to show people what it was all about. In a similar way this is all God really asks of us in terms of spreading the good news. We should like the product enough that we want to share it. If people react like the Ethiopian Eunuch all the better. If they don’t.... well, we did our part.

When I was at Nashotah House, I once explained to the board that it could really help the finances if they helped in recruiting donors. One particularly dyspeptic board member chimed in and said, “we tried that once and it didn’t work.” Now besides explaining a lot about Nashotah House’s finances it is also a representation of what God does not want. We are not to try evangelism once and then give up. We are not to be embarrassed of our faith and think it is something to hide like an Osmond Family record collection, rather it should just be part of who we are. And by being part of us it should be on display in the same way other parts of our personality are on display. We do not need to be obnoxious about it but just like me taking someone to Costco we should share because it is something that is worth sharing. We should not fear failure but should rather account for the hope that is in us so that we may be God’s own this day and forevermore.