

## **Go Over to This Chariot and Join It**

*May 14, 2006*

(Easter 5 - Year B)

Acts 8: 26-40

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

In the Book of Acts is one of my favorite stories in Scripture:  
The story of Philip and the Ethiopian official.

An angel of the Lord tells Philip to go to the road that goes south from  
Jerusalem to Gaza.

On that road is a chariot, and in that chariot is a high-ranking Ethiopian  
official from far away in Africa.

And in the chariot, the Ethiopian man is reading scripture aloud, from  
the prophet Isaiah.

The Holy Spirit says to Philip:  
“Go over to this chariot and join it.”

So, Philip runs up to the chariot and asks the Ethiopian if he knows what  
he is reading.

The Ethiopian invites Philip to get inside the chariot and sit beside him.  
Philip then shares the good news, the Ethiopian asks to be baptized, and  
he goes on his way home to Ethiopia rejoicing.

The Holy Spirit says to Philip:  
“Go over to this chariot and join it.”

The word “join” that the writer of Luke and Acts uses here does not just  
mean to sit down inside the chariot.

The word means: to unite with, to join, to hold on to, to stick to.

It is the same word that Luke uses when he describes when dust sticks to  
your feet.

The Holy Spirit says to Philip:  
Go over to this chariot and join it, unite to it, stick to it.

So, Philip runs up to the chariot and sits next to the Ethiopian.  
Philip sticks with the Ethiopian and joins together with him as they share  
the good news of Jesus Christ.

This reminds me of how my younger son, John, and I like to watch TV  
together sometimes.

In our family room, we have a big blue chair, and we also have a big  
blue couch.

Sometimes, John will sit in that big blue chair, watching TV, and he will  
say:

“Dad, come sit with me.”

So, the two of us squeeze in together, joined almost at the hip, and we sit  
side by side and watch football or a Seinfeld re-run.

It is not the most comfortable way to watch TV.

But, it is a special time because I have been invited into John’s chariot,  
to join with him and unite with him in a special father and son  
time.

The Holy Spirit prompts us to

“Go over to this chariot and join it.”

The Holy Spirit asks us to sit side by side with someone else and to  
share our stories.

C.S. Lewis, who wrote *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, was a  
British theologian.

C. S. Lewis wrote in his book *The Four Loves*:

“Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other;

Friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest (page 91).”

Friends stick with each other, sitting side by side, sharing a common  
interest,

Much like 2 guys fishing silently for hours on a dock at the lake.

Friends sit side by side in the chariot, sticking with each other as they  
share their common interests.

Friends sit side by side, helping each other to understand Jesus Christ,  
through Scripture.

The Holy Spirit prompts us to  
“Go over to this chariot and join it,”  
To sit side by side, watching TV in a big blue chair together or sharing a  
common interest.

And *we* must listen for the Holy Spirit, asking *us* to join someone else in  
*their* chariot.

Last Friday, I was in Houston on my day off and I went to work out at  
my old gym.

After the workout, I was in the sauna, and a man was in there who  
looked like he was having troubles with his knee.

I asked him:

“Havin’ trouble swimming with that knee?”

In some sense, the Spirit was prompting me to go over and to join his  
chariot.

We then began to have a conversation.

The conversation led to my move to Waco, and why I felt called to be  
here.

We ended up talking about our faith, and sharing stories, as friends, side  
by side.

I had never met this man at the gym before.

His name was Bobby, but he could just as easily have been an Ethiopian  
official from far away in Africa, sitting in his chariot and reading  
from Isaiah.

For, the Holy Spirit prompts us to  
Go over to this chariot and join it,  
To sit side by side with the man from Ethiopia.

Legend has it that the man from Ethiopia went home to Africa, rejoicing,  
and bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to his homeland.

The thriving Ethiopian Church traces its roots back to the encounter in  
the chariot between Philip and the Ethiopian official.

And today, the Ethiopian Church is an ancient oasis of Christianity  
surrounded by Muslim countries.

My brother traveled to Ethiopia on business a few years ago, and he brought me back an Ethiopian cross, which many of the men wear under their shirts as a symbol of Christian devotion. It is a smaller version of the elaborate and beautiful Ethiopian crosses that are carried in their church processions.

I am wearing this Ethiopian cross today to remind us of the importance of sitting side by side with someone in their chariot, of sticking with them, of sharing our faith in Jesus Christ.

Which brings me to my challenge to each of you:  
In this next week,  
I want each of us to listen for the Holy Spirit, prompting us to  
Go over to this chariot and join it.

You don't have to use any fancy techniques or pamphlets.  
Just sit side by side with someone in this next week in their chariot and allow yourself to talk about faith, about St. Alban's, about Jesus.

And, if you join with someone in their chariot, and you think that I might enjoy getting to know them, also.  
Then, give me a call or send me an email, and say:  
"Jeff, I think you might like getting to know so-and-so."  
Then, I promise to take you and your friend out to lunch.

For, that is how God is going to grow this church.  
One friend, one side-by-side relationship at a time.  
But, it is going to take each one of you, sticking with folks, willing to be open to take a few risks.

Philip was told by the Holy Spirit:  
"Go over to this chariot and join it."  
And, Philip could have made excuses or said,  
"Episcopalians don't do things like that."  
But, Philip *did* follow the Spirit's prompting, and because of his risk, the Ethiopian Church was born.

For, my friends, if we, as Episcopalians, *don't do things* like share our  
faith with a friend,  
Then, we will die.

The Holy Spirit doesn't tell us to go beat people over the head with the  
Gospel.

But, the Holy Spirit says to Philip and says to each of us:  
Go and sit side by side with a friend.  
Go over to this chariot,  
And join it.

AMEN.

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