

**Sermon for Sunday, July 3, 2022**  
**Fourth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Travels with the Spirit - “Oh, the People You’ll Meet”**  
**Pastor Karla Wildberger**  
**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church Decorah, Iowa**

**Psalm 126, Galatians 3:23-29, Acts 8:26-40**

**Grace and peace to you travelers from God our Creator and our Lord and traveling companion, Jesus Christ, Amen.**

Good morning!! Again, it is wonderful to be with you today ... and for the following two weeks. I was so excited months ago when speaking with Pastor Amy and she told me about the summer series, “Traveling with the Spirit”.

It is always a good reminder on our journey with Jesus that we are never alone – the Holy Spirit is ALWAYS with us through the twists and turns of our faith journey.

My hubby and I LOVE to travel!! We know we are blessed and privileged to do so. Pastor Rolf shared with me that he has spoken about Rick Steves and shown the video of “Why We Travel”. My hubby and I have been on five Rick Steves Tours, through the company. We respect his company and thoroughly enjoy the tours’ focus on history and culture of each city or country we are visiting.

In preparing for my preaching time with you all today, I read an interview Rick Steves did for a podcast on “Why We Travel”. In the interview Rick said, *“And I’m realizing that what makes a good traveler is being positive, being curious, being eager to get out of your comfort zone and try something new and to learn from other people.”*

My hubby is retired from the USAF. After we were first married we were stationed in the North of England, and for our first anniversary he took me to Paris. Romantic? Right? (heavy sigh) I wish!!! I was so scared and nervous, and my mind was full of the awful stereotypes of Parisiens; I tried to take in how amazing Paris is! This young gal, originally from South Dakota, was standing at the feet of the Eiffel Tower, wow, and eating a pain au chocolat!!! Brilliant!!! But even with all the amazing sites and tasty treats, I was so scared!!! I was a little curious but I was NOT “eager to get out of my comfort zone” as Rick Steves suggests! (I am pretty sure it was also this trip that my hubby learned the hard way that he had to keep me well fed and watered 😊)

That was my first visit to Paris. Years and years later (with more travel under my belt), my second visit to Paris was a totally different scenario. I got lost!!! I was by myself, thought I knew my way back to the hotel, all I had was this photo copy of a map. When I realized I was lost, I took a few deep breaths and told myself to remain calm. I was walking down a street, decided to turn left; it wasn't long and I saw some young men standing by the street. As I got closer I realized they were French Army personnel, carrying long guns. I walked up to them and said, “Parlez vous Anglais?” (Do you speak English?) They replied, “oui.” I said, “I am lost, I need to get here (and I point to the map).” They replied, “We are not from Paris! Go ask those boys.” They pointed to some young men coming out of a courtyard. So I go up to them, again asked, “Parlez vous Anglais?” They said, “oui.” Between the few young men looking at my map, talking with each other, they eventually got me going in the correct direction!!! Whew!!!

I got back to the hotel, a little shook up, but none the worse for wear. But had that been my first visit to Paris, I seriously would have been a mess and I am sure my anxiousness would have made me sick. I stayed calm, asked for help from strangers and got home. (Turns out the fellas with the long guns were security for a Synagogue, which was where the other young fellas came out of.)

***“And I’m realizing that what makes a good traveler is being positive, being curious, being eager to get out of your comfort zone and try something new and to learn from other people.” (Rick Steves)*** These traits for a good traveler also come in handy as we are on our faith journey. I have found that when we can move out of our comfort zones we can see and experience So. Much. More!!!

We have the perfect example in front of us this morning with Philip and the Eunuch. Yes, the Spirit was guiding Philip, but we all know that as humans we are VERY good at ignoring the Spirit - turning a blind eye when the Spirit is trying to show us something, right? You know I am right 😊. But this time Philip listened as the Spirit guided him to the chariot. Everything could have come to a screeching halt at that moment because as humans are now, humans were then – judgmental of folks who look different than us. Acts deliberately calls the gentleman on the chariot an Ethiopian Eunuch. Scholars do not know why he is a eunuch, and I don’t believe it matters. What we know is that this gentleman was learned, had a position of responsibility, and was a person of color. He was reading from the prophet Isaiah when Philip approached the chariot, and look what happened after that!!! Can you imagine being there, listening to them? It sounds like it was the most amazing theological conversation!!! The sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ and the gentleman was baptized. That’s evangelism at its finest and purest. As one of my long ago seminary professors wrote on this event: *“This is a sheer miracle – a miracle full of the grace of God in the person of Philip and the waters of renewal. The impossibility of this event is made possible by the unbelievable reach of God’s grace.”* (Richard Jensen, *Working Preacher*) He went on to write: *“That’s the whole story of the Book of Acts. God’s grace is wildly inclusive. The church is moved out to the ends of the earth and reaches out still today.”*

The gentleman hungered to know the truth. Philip was led by the Holy Spirit and by the actions of both men – being positive, curious, eager – barriers were broken. “God’s grace is wildly inclusive!” I believe that we need to be crying this out from our pulpits and street corners!!! Yes, we each have our own opinions about this, that and the other thing, but when it comes to our faith, our journey with Jesus, we must proclaim: God’s grace is wildly inclusive!!! And to be able to proclaim this amazing, awesome truth we ask the Holy Spirit to fill us to be a good traveler – full of being positive, being curious, being eager to get out of our comfort zone.

Because look what happens when we do – the good news is shared, the waters of baptism rain down, grace is shared, and ALL are included and welcome.

God’s grace is wildly inclusive!

Amen.