

Mission Statement Slide

Picture of the Thing Sign

Apparently if head East on Interstate 10 on the other side of Tucson is a tourist trap known as the Thing. It is a museum of course that includes wild and wacky things. Do you want to know that the Thing actually is? Well it is this,

Picture of the Thing

It is a mummy in a coffin. There now I have saved you tons of money because you don’t have to stop and see it. Speaking of wild and wacky things. We are going to talk this morning about one of the strangest stories in the Bible. It is the story of the Ethiopian Eunuch. Think about this scenario. This guy is rich. He can afford a chariot and someone to pull him along. He is in charge of the Treasury so he is an upper crust society guy. You would consider him as someone on the President’s cabinet. For whatever reason he decides to go to Jerusalem and worship. So on the way home he is on a dusty road out in the middle of nowhere. As he is being pulled along in his chariot, he is reading the Old Testament from the book Isaiah.

Philip, who we first discover is one of the deacons mentioned last week who was selected to take care of the hungry widows. Well apparently Philip grows in his faith and is sharing the Gospel with the world. We read the following in Acts 26:1

“Than an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza”(This is a wilderness road).

So the Ethiopian is heading south, going home, riding in a Chariot reading scripture and out in the wilderness along comes Philip. Philip runs along the chariot and hears the Ethiopian reading and says, Do you understand what you are reading?

The Eunuch who is reading Isaiah asks, is this about the prophet or someone else. Philip begins with Scripture and tells the guy about Jesus. Then we read the following.

“As they were going along eh road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?”

The answer. Nothing. Philip baptizes him and then he is transported by the Enterprise as scripture says, the Lord snatched him away. We read the last line,

The eunuch saw him no more, and he went on his way rejoicing.

Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Community church says when you are talking about Jesus with someone who is not a Christian, refrain from telling any weird God stories. Many of us have them. Here is one of mine.

Mount Rainer

I was 14 standing with two other climbers on the side of Mount Rainer. When you climb the mountain, you get up at midnight when the snow is frozen because that makes it safe. The danger is getting off the

mountain as the day warms up. Melting snow means more crevasses and also it loosens rocks. So we were descending and came upon a place which was backed up like the cars at Riggs road. Only one rope team could go through at a time, so we were waiting. For some strange reason, I felt an urge to move. I said, why don't we move a little closer, and we did about 40 feet. While we were waiting we heard a noise. Right where we were standing, a huge boulder crashed through on that spot. It came out of nowhere. We would have been hurt or killed for sure. So you see, you get stuck with me, because some 50 years ago, God told me to move.

Well this is some weird God story?! Why oh why, is this in the Bible? You may recall that the mission is given to the apostles in Acts 1:8

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Well at this point in Acts they are already out in Samaria. This kind of sounds like the ends of the earth. Secondly, what do we know about Eunuchs. I know it a subject you never thought we would discuss in worship on a Sunday morning. Eunuchs are mentioned in the Old Testament. You could become one by accident. It could be done to you as a slave. This way you could guard a princess and they wouldn't worry about any hanky-panky. You also could be interestingly enough, have it done to you by your own older brother. Eunuchs could never become a king, so an older brother would remove you as a threat.

So whatever the case, this guy is a court official to Queen Candace of Ethiopia. While he is in position of power is his also an outsider. He is maimed. We do not know if he is a Jew or a Gentile. Whatever the case he came to Jerusalem to worship God but would not be welcomed in the Temple. Eunuchs are not allowed. This guy could be the first Gentile convert to Christianity. Oh by the way, Christian tradition states that he was most likely African, meaning his skin was black. In the Eastern Orthodox Church they claim he is Simeon called Niger mentioned in Acts 13:1. So there you have it, a sexually maimed, black, gentile or Jew, who became baptized and went on is way rejoicing. Tradition has it that this guy ended up bringing Christianity to Africa.

So what is our lesson this morning? Well I think we can all be put on notice to be very, very careful to welcome and invite the outsiders among us. Ever visited a church and you were treated as if you had leprosy? I once attended a church and no one talked to me. I was glared at because it seemed I was sitting in someone's pew. After worship everyone was talking to each other. As I left I noticed the church sign, All Are Welcomed.

Well I don't want that on our future church sign, unless we are willing and wanting to actually practice it. Last week I mentioned that we can continue to develop our Character and DNA of MLC. I am so glad and actually quite proud that your church council choose to have a new welcome statement listed on our web site. There is a copy of it in your bulletin this morning. It really fits the whole theme of this morning. The way of Jesus is open to all. No one is excluded. So please take out your copy and follow along as I read it to you this morning.

When visitors arrive at Coventry Cathedral in England, they are greeted at the door with the following sign:

We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, widowed, straight, gay, confused, well-heeled or down-at-heel. We especially welcome wailing babies and

excited toddlers. We welcome you whether you can sing like Pavarotti or just growl quietly to yourself. You're welcome here if you're just browsing, just woken up or just got out of prison. We don't care if you're more Christian than the Archbishop of Canterbury or haven't been to church since Christmas 10 years ago. We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet and to teenagers who are growing up too fast.

We welcome keep-fit moms, football dads, starving artists, tree huggers, latte sippers, vegetarians, junk food eaters. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you're having problems, are down in the dumps or don't like organized religion. We're not that keen on it either. We offer welcome to those who think the Earth is flat, work too hard, don't work, can't spell, or are here because Granny is visiting and wanted to come to church.. We welcome those who are inked, pierced, both or neither.

We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down their throats as kids or got lost and wound up here by mistake. We welcome pilgrims, tourists, seekers, doubters and you.

Maricopa Lutheran extends the same invitation. Let us sit and sing!