

WEDNESDAY 29 June 2022 "Samaritan joy!" (Acts 8:1-8)

Hello my "Walking with Jesus" friends,

Probably most of us have moved from one place to another, perhaps several times in our lifetimes, right? Do you remember those emotions? The sadness of leaving all that is familiar and the anxiety of moving to a new place where everything is unfamiliar. Suddenly you felt lost, perhaps even like a child needing help with almost everything. Most people move after much thought and planning. However, in recent years we've seen a migration of millions of people all around the world that is staggering. Most recently it's been Ukrainian people forced from their homes by bombs and bullets, fleeing to neighboring EU countries and South American's fleeing corrupt governments and drug cartels. In recent years past it was Syrians fleeing the bombs and North African's fleeing extreme poverty and famine.

It's not difficult for us to visualize the panic-stricken people fleeing Jerusalem 2000 year ago, as described in Acts 8. **"...a great persecution broke out against the church [followers of Jesus] at Jerusalem and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria... Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed Jesus Christ there. When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they all paid close attention to what he said..."** (Acts 8:1-6) For most of these people, it was probably not their intention to leave Jerusalem permanently, but like most refugees, they likely took only some of their belongings, and did not sell their houses, but hoped to return home soon, believing this was a temporary upheaval situation. Judea and Samaria were the provinces immediately around Jerusalem, within several miles. Many of these people probably had friends or extended family living within a few days' travel.

As these Jews fleeing Jerusalem arrived in other towns, very quickly people gathered around them asking a multitude of questions regarding what was happening in Jerusalem. *Of course, every question ultimately led to Jesus, for He was the center of all the ruckus!* WHO Jesus was? WHY Jesus was crucified and WHAT His death meant? The facts about His resurrection and especially the stories about those who had seen Him, spent time with Him, even had meals with Him AFTER His resurrection, these were the stories most often asked about. And then of course the story of the Holy Spirit of God who came in great power on Pentecost day and all that had happened in Jerusalem since. As you can see when those fleeing Jerusalem arrived in a new place, they had plenty to talk about and it could take them many days before they told everything they knew and had experienced! *It was like a spiritual flood rippling out from Jerusalem in all directions! That's what Acts 8:4 means!* It was exactly what Jesus had promised would happen: **"The Holy Spirit will come upon you in power, and you will be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in Judea and all Samaria, and to the ends of the earth..."** (Acts 1:8)

Well, it hadn't reached **'the ends of the earth'** as yet, but the spiritual Tsunami was moving out rapidly and with great power! Philip is the second of the seven men named in Acts 6:5, who had been selected in Jerusalem to serve the rapidly growing Jesus movement as a Deacon in providing practical help to widows and so many other people in need. Evidently Philip was a bold speaker and anointed by the Holy Spirit of God Philip did as Peter had done, and some specific miracles drew the attention of many people in Samaria. Luke writes: **"With shrieks evil spirits came out of many people, and paralytics and cripples were healed. So, there was great joy in that city."** (Acts 8:7) Luke does not give us more details of these miracles than that one line. We also have no reports of the other 5 Deacons names in Acts 6:5... where they went or what they did. Seems to me the Holy Spirit led Dr. Luke to tell us about Philip because his experiences were so significant.

Samaria, you'll recall, was the province just north of Jerusalem, and the Samaritan people who lived there were mistrusted by both Judean and Galilean Jews who lived on both sides of Samaria. In fact, I think it's safe to say outright bigotry and racism existed in their attitudes. *The Samaritans you see, were descendants of the Jews who lived in Israel 700 years before when the great Assyrian army conquered Israel and intentionally populated that area north of Jerusalem with conquered peoples from many other nations.* You'll find the description of that strategy in 2 Kings 17:22-24. It is for that reason I stand amazed that Philip was apparently led, by the Holy Spirit, INTO Samaria to bring the message of hope in Jesus to people other Jews disliked. That is a wonderful evidence of the heart change work of Jesus! I see no hesitation, no push back from Philip, but rather as soon as he arrived, even though we have no indication he knew anyone in Samaria, *Philip was quick to start telling the story of Jesus.*

I wonder if Philip started by telling these Samaritans of the day Jesus intentionally led His disciples from Jerusalem, into Samaria, on their way north to Galilee. John the beloved disciple gives us the story, (John 4:1-42) and I think maybe John had told Philip all about it! John writes that Jesus had led them to the city of Sychar and being thirsty He stopped at the town well for a drink. There he met a woman who had come to draw water. John does not give us her name, but she was so impacted by her conversation with Jesus that she ran back to town and brought many of the townspeople back to the well to meet Jesus. His words were kind and brought such hope to the people that they actually invited Him to stay the night. *He ended up spending several days there in Samaria, at the invitation of the people of that town.* John records that as they were leaving, the people of Sychar said to the woman: **"We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world!"** (John 4:42)

That event would have probably occurred less than one year before Philip's arrival in Samaria. Can you imagine as Philip spoke of Jesus someone in the crowd might have shouted... *"Yes, I know the man you speak of! He visited my town Sychar once. I saw Him, I heard Him speak.*

If you, Philip, are a follower of the Jesus who came to my town, we celebrate that God has brought you to us now! Tell us more, tell us everything you know of Jesus.' And Dr. Luke records **"There was great joy in that city."** (Acts 8:8) Oh how I love that summary statement. Can it be said of your city my friends, wherever you live around the world? *Is there "Samaria style Jesus joy" in your city?*

Let's pause right here and ponder that. *What is the reputation of Jesus Christ in your city, and why?* As you reflect on how your city has changed over the years you've lived there, has the reputation of Jesus changed? Are there times Jesus is celebrated in your city? Have there been wonderful things happen in your city which can only be explained as Jesus did something special?

Let's talk to Jesus about all this and I found a song that I think reflects what those Samaritans were celebrating with Philip in their "Jesus Joy"...

Today's Scripture is Acts 8:1-8.