

There's a guy on TV called Dr Phil – bald and big moustache, is that the one? In the few brief snippets I've seen he seems to be a nice guy but honestly I wouldn't have a clue. Dr Phil is my nickname for Phil Hollard, the church administrator – he has no moustache and plenty of hair. In addition there are a couple of Dr Phil's in the New Testament – Philip actually and we're going to find out a little about one of them this morning.

In Acts 6 Phil was one of seven men chosen to share the food out to the growing community in Jerusalem – pretty up to date isn't it with Food Share and others operating in Dunedin; some people felt they were excluded (reminds me of sleeping in cars and all that.) Obviously Phil had good organisational skills.

Having proved himself in this area his responsibilities grew. He became a preacher and spoke effectively and performed miracles in a city north of Jerusalem – such was the effect of what he did, it was said there was much joy in the city – we could do with this Phillip now.

After a couple of classic encounters between light and darkness we pick up Phil's story in Acts 8. Noah Scott is reading from the Contemporary English Version – if you want to know why, come and see me afterwards.

**Acts 8:26-40**

**26 The Lord's angel said to Philip, 'Go south along the desert road that leads from Jerusalem to Gaza.' 27 So Philip left.**

**An important Ethiopian official happened to be going along that road in his chariot. He was the chief treasurer for Candace, the Queen of Ethiopia.**

**The official had gone to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was now on his way home. He was sitting in his chariot, reading the book of the prophet Isaiah.**

**29 The Spirit told Philip to catch up with the chariot. 30 Philip ran up close and heard the man reading aloud from the book of Isaiah. Philip asked him, 'Do you understand what you are reading?'**

**31 The official answered, 'How can I understand unless someone helps me?' He then invited Philip to come up and sit beside him.**

**32 The man was reading the passage that said,**

**'He was led like a sheep  
on its way to be killed.**

**He was silent as a lamb  
whose wool**

**is being cut off,  
and he did not say  
a word.**

**33 He was treated like a nobody  
and did not receive  
a fair trial.**

**How can he have children,  
if his life  
is snatched away?'**

**34 The official said to Philip, 'Tell me, was the prophet talking about himself or about someone else?' 35 So Philip began at this place in the Scriptures and explained the good news about Jesus.**

**36-37 As they were going along the road, they came to a place where there was some water. The official said, 'Look! Here is some water. Why can't I be baptized?' 38 He ordered the chariot to stop. Then they both went down into the water, and Philip baptized him 39 After they had come out of the water, the Lord's Spirit took Philip away. The official never saw him again, but he was very happy as he went on his way. 40 Philip later appeared in Azotus. He went from town to town, all the way to Caesarea, telling people about Jesus.**

#### **DR PHIL:**

'I'm really enjoying my life. It's so different from anything I could have dreamed of a few months ago. Following Jesus has radically changed me. It was great in Samaria seeing the way Jesus worked in me, through me and in other people. I feel I only existed before this.

Then I got this strong sense from the Lord to go to the desert road south, I was pretty keen to go.

As I got there, I saw this incredible sight – an African man, sitting in his chariot reading from a manuscript. As I got closer the words sounded familiar and I began to understand he was reading from my favourite prophet, Isaiah.

I didn't know this man from Adam, or Haile Selassie to be honest. He seemed to read only a few words and then look troubled. So I took the bull by the horns and asked him if he knew what he was reading. He invited me to join him in the chariot and asked directly 'how can I understand unless someone helps me?' I wasn't sure I could help him but he was reading words I knew a little about.

When he'd finished reading some more words and looking very troubled he asked – who's this about? Is he talking about himself or someone else? Man, this was too good to be true, this guy was very open.

So I told him as clearly as I could about God's plan, about Jesus' birth, about Jesus' life and death; what happened when he came back to life and how I'd become one his followers and I'd been baptised to show I was his.

The thing that amazed me is I thought this guy was coming from a long way back but obviously the Spirit who'd been working in my life was working in his too.

He couldn't contain himself, he so longed to follow the Jesus way that when we passed a small pond he exclaimed, here's the water; what's to stop me from being baptised? Indeed why not?

So I did – strangely though as soon as I did that I felt my job was done, I was gone – trying to keep up with Jesus as my adventurous life continued.

I ended up in Azotus and lots of other places - what a ride it was proving to be!

#### **CONCLUSION:**

One word I could never use to describe following Jesus is boring. A man I taught in 1971 came to see me recently – he's now a one-armed Jesus' follower – has been for years. Let me assure you he wasn't a Jesus' follower at school – it was my first year teaching and he told me the class was out to break me – I wouldn't have guessed - NOT! He asked 'were you praying for me then?' Memory tells me I was praying night and day that I'd survive – maybe that included praying for my classes – sure it did. He said somebody was! You never know. I hope he'll tell his story here one day. Meeting up with him has been one of the great ongoing adventures in my spiritual journey.

Jesus above all else calls us to an adventure with him, it's so much more than the boring, technology infused life I see some young people living today. It's an adventure based on simple commitments and abandoning who we are to Jesus.

There are things about Phil or Philip I find challenging and encouraging

1. He was open to Jesus, led by Jesus - he was glad to say yes.
2. He engaged the man on his terms – you're reading – do you understand what you're reading? And he was patient. **'Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.'**
3. He responded to the man's desire to be baptised.
4. Job done, he was on his way. It's thought the Ethiopian was the one who took the Christian message to his own country and there Christianity flourished for centuries.
5. Ella today begins as the Ethiopian and has the potential to be Philip – Philippa to be more precise.

What about you? What's to stop you from being baptised? What do you still need to know? I'm happy to talk with you so we can learn together.

#### **BEFORE ELLA'S BAPTISM**

Two Sundays ago at Ebony's baptism her grandmother Elizabeth James mentioned that her family could trace the presence of Christian faith back to the 1400s – a wonderful story. On the other side of Ebony's family, her grandmother, Penny said she could trace Ebony's faith from the time Penny starting going to a Baptist Church in a new housing estate in Britain as a girl. Eventually Penny met Dave and Ebony's grandparents and great-grandparents came to Dunedin. David and Penny's daughter Jody met Bruce and one thing led to another.

I find this very encouraging; the long story of faith and a relatively new family being linked into the Kingdom.

Ella has another story. Her grandmother, Henriette, arrived in Oamaru from the Netherlands as a nine year old. The dashing young Rick Watson - flowing locks, leather jacket, motorbike and all lived in Oamaru too. Rick's father advised him **'find a girl, settle down, if you want you can marry – look at me I am old but I'm happy'**. So he did – he married Henriette. Rick was baptised at Oamaru in the dark mists of time; Henriette's strong faith came from her parents. Their daughter Karene, Ella's mother, was baptised here on 26 August 1990, 7 weeks after the young man she would marry.

Ella is the 6<sup>th</sup> generation of the Wright family who've been part of this community and in each generation they've served Jesus in different ways - James Wright began attending here in 1879, William his son, Ella's great-grandfather Graham, William's son. Graham's daughter Trudy (Ella's other grandmother) and her father Randal. Actually Graham, Randal and Karene were baptised in this pool – different paint, different water though.

There are many ways by which people come to faith; come to Christian community and not all stories are as tidy as these. Ella, as your grandfather, I've known you since you were minutes old. You've brought so much joy into our lives and it's a thrill to share in this commitment you're making today. Tell us how you got to this moment.