

GRACE, Apr. 30, 2005

SCRIPTURE EXPLORATION

Acts 8:36-38

As they traveled along the road,
they came to some water and the eunuch said,
"Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?"
And he gave orders to stop the chariot.

Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

Since its very beginnings, the church of Jesus Christ has wrestled over issues of inclusion and exclusion.

Who can be received as a member? What are the qualifications, barriers, or tests required? Who is permitted to assume a leadership role?

In the Bible, the book of Deuteronomy is very clear that the sexual minorities of that day - eunuchs - were not allowed to be members of the worshiping community; in fact, they were excluded altogether from Jewish life.

However, in the book of Acts, we find the painful yet empowering story that poignantly demonstrates the life of grace we find in Jesus Christ - Philip's encounter with an Ethiopian eunuch. In short, this outcast wants to be baptized. Philip had a decision to make, but recognizing the boundless invitation of God's inclusive love in Christ, Philip receives the eunuch as a member of the church.

Isaiah 56:3-7:

"Let no foreigner who has bound
himself to the LORD say, 'The LORD will
surely exclude me from his people.' . . .

This is what the LORD says:

'To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths,
who choose what pleases me and hold fast
to my covenant—to them I will give
within my temple and its walls
a memorial and a name better than
sons and daughters; I will give them
an everlasting name . . .

And foreigners who bind themselves
to the LORD to serve him . . .
these I will bring to my holy mountain
and give them joy in my house of prayer.'