

Seizing the Moment**Acts 8:26-35**

The phrase 'seize the day' is taken from a Latin phrase *carpe diem* and can be traced to a poem by the Epicurean poet, Horace. The full quotation is, "seize the day, putting as little trust as possible in the future." *Carpe Diem* was picked up by the American film *Dead Poets Society*, where a teacher challenges his boys, "Seize the day, boys. Make your lives extraordinary."

After the persecution of Christians in Jerusalem, which culminated in the martyrdom of the Deacon Stephen, Christians were scattered, Philip finds himself on the desert road to Gaza. And there he came across an important foreign dignitary in a chariot. Quite probably a black man. Quite probably a God-fearer though not a Jew. How he came to have a scroll of the prophet Isaiah is not explained – but he did not understand what he was reading and – Philip seizes the moment, prompted by the Spirit, and strikes up a conversation. And they talk about Jesus.

You do not have to be an apostle, or a minister, to know that such moments come along fairly frequently. When you let slip that you go to church. When you appear to know the words of the Lord's Prayer at an event when it is used. When you join in with a hymn and know the tune beside someone who doesn't. When a time of grief or tragedy comes along and you talk about how your faith helps you. When someone asks you why you bother with Christmas and Easter. When someone shares with you something about their health, or that of a loved one.

Seizing the moment and speaking about what you believe does not have to be a Billy Graham rally with thousands of people listening in. It is, very often, a simple thing, an un-showy thing, a sharing thing. It doesn't require a great intellectual grasp of theology – but it certainly requires sincerity, and your words ought to match your actions.

Philip said a little of what he understood the bible passage from Isaiah meant to him, and then went on to talk about the good news of Jesus. It strikes me as probably a very ordinary conversation for a person of faith. What is extraordinary is that Philip saw the moment when it came, and seized it, and then did the best that he could.

God asks no more, and no less, of us.

Acts 8:36-40

Because Philip seized the moment and took the time, there was something in what he said and how he said it that moved the Ethiopian. And inspired him also to seize the moment. As they are driving along they must have passed a stream, and wanting to make good his new-found faith, the Ethiopian asks to be baptised.

It is not that things happened like that all the time – and we need to be aware that the writer of Acts, Luke, is probably making another point about how people from all around the world were being attracted by the good news of Jesus, but there is something about the directness and the immediacy of the approach that leaves us gasping, concerned and probably a little envious.

Gasping at the audacity of the moment. Concerned about what happened next. Envious about the apparent ease Philip's simple sincerity brought about faith in a stranger.

It is not much of a life to spend our time regretting missed opportunities. How much we waste time on, 'if only'. Rather, what this story reminds us is that there are times when everything falls in to place and we seize the moment, or should seize the moment, and do the thing that inspires us. If we go wrong, there is usually time to make amends, or God brings us to a crossroads of decision further down the road and we can start again. Being overly cautious and

being overly impetuous are no great virtues. But seeing the right moment when it comes along, and doing something with it – is a good thing, surely.

I don't think this is the sort of thing you can lay plans down for – but I suspect that there is more to do for us to be prepared – to think the right thing; to say the right thing; to do the right thing. All those moments coming up for you next week; in faith – seize them – and give God the glory.

Amen