Here we are, again.¹

The cycle of police violence and public outrage are once again filling our lives.
Or I should say that these conflicts are burdening some with the weight of history of oppression, silencing, and violence while others of us have the luxury to see these events as yet another piece of breaking news, here today but gone tomorrow when some other bit of sensationalism will draw our listening ears.

Here we are, again.

Staring at the devastating effects of earthquake and aftershocks in Nepal and surrounding countries on the TV or computer. Shaking our heads at the impossible suffering of so many. Wondering how people will be helped. What aid agencies are the most efficient? How will that country every recover?

And, so, here we are, again… in church to try to make sense of the conflated and conflicting news and feelings that have flooded us this week, or here we are again because this is what we do on a Sunday morning. This is what we do. We come together to try to make sense of the world around us.

And, the familiar start to our worship service leads into a strange reading from Acts. Angels and the Spirit are no gentle inner nudges in our story today.

They move Philip from place to place and provide the steroids needed for him to race alongside a chariot. The story is an encounter that crosses racial, socio-economic and gender lines.

There is the Ethiopian Eunuch. This is how he is known, never given a name. He is labeled by his body and where he comes from. He is from another region. He is another race. He is an official with high status.

On this wilderness road, he is months from reaching his homeland. Despite his status and authority, he is looking for something more. Compelled to seek God, he is returning from what must have been an unsuccessful journey to the temple in Jerusalem.

Unsuccessful because as a eunuch, this man could not have been a Jew, for he would be considered ritually unclean. In a community that valued fertility and physical wholeness highly, a castrated man would be someone to pity, maybe, but also someone to avoid. So he would have been an outsider and an alien to Jews.

And, then there’s Philip, not the disciple Philip, but a last minute addition to the team spreading good news throughout Palestine. This Philip had wild success making disciples in Samaria, and then an angel of God sent him down a wilderness road.

And two worlds collide.

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4 See Acts 6
There couldn’t be two people from more separate worlds. God sent Philip down this wilderness road, and into the chariot of a foreigner, alongside a castrated male.

Really, this encounter would never have happened. Philip would have been worried about being too close to someone gender neutral. And, the higher classed Ethiopian would not have wanted to pick up a dusty peasant on the side of the road, even if he is able to run alongside the chariot.

But, Philip listened to God.

And, when Philip asks if he understands Isaiah, the search for God and meaning obliterates the barriers between these two. Instead of urging his chariot to go faster and leave the panting stranger in the dust, the eunuch brings him in to the chariot.

And, he listens as Philip tells him the suffering servant, the one who was humiliated is Jesus, Jesus the Christ. Philip tells him the Good News.

Philip tells him of angels announcing a baby born in Bethlehem, born to bring peace, born for all the world.

The eunuch listens to Jesus’ baptismal story in the Jordan. And how he came to preach good news to the poor, release to the captives, and liberation for the oppressed.

Moved by the power of the Good News, the eunuch sees water and is baptized by an all too willing Philip.

3
Because, maybe, just maybe,
the eunuch isn’t the only one to be converted that day.
Philip who may have been skeptical, reluctant,
fearful around someone unlike him is
convicted by his own telling of the story,
by his own telling of the Good News.

Because as Philip tells of a gospel that *transcends* _ethnic, racial, and cultural boundaries constructed by hate, fear, and tradition_*

he **listens** to his own words and the gospel works on him, too.

_The race, nationality, or sexual identity of the person
did not seem to matter to him anymore._

*Here was a human being who heard the good news about Jesus,*
*wanted to become part of the group, and requested baptism.*
**Who was Philip to stand in the way?**

The power of the gospel is the ability to overcome,
To unite when worlds collide.

*In Acts the Angel of the Lord releases people from bondage (12:7, 8).*
*The Angel of the Lord and the Spirit facilitate*
*the human encounters* _for listening and_
*crossing boundaries and shaking people from comfort zones._

*God who raised Jesus orchestrates unlikely relationships that the*
*status quo does not otherwise permit for the transformation of*
*marginalized individuals.* _If we’re willing to go down the wilderness road._

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5 Baker, Coleman. Preaching This Week. May 3, 2015.
6 Smith, Mitzi J. Preaching This Week. May 6, 2013.
7 Smith, Mitzi J. Preaching This Week. May 6, 2013.
The wilderness road we walk today is littered with racial injustice. Our nation has not overcome the effects of slavery and racism. Years of police profiling, of housing policies and economic practices and inadequate education that benefit the haves and increase the divide between the haves and have nots, must be confronted.

When two worlds collide
Our own prejudices must be confronted. Our inaction must be confronted.

I don’t know the desperation of those involved in the riots in Baltimore this week, if you are like me, then I invite you to listen to what is underneath. To listen to understand the violence is a symptom. If you know this desperation, I invite you to share the gospel to those of us listening.

In the coming days, weeks and months, may our spirits be awakened, may our sight be cleared, may our hearts listen and be set fire to pursue justice.

Amen.