

I. Advanced Organizer

A. Story of **William Seymour and Azusa St.:**

1. **William Joseph Seymour** was an African-American man born in Louisiana in 1870. His childhood was not an easy one. His parents, Simon and Phyllis were former slaves. William was the oldest in a large family that lived in abject poverty. He grew up in a dangerous time for African-Americans in the south. The KKK actively terrorized the blacks of southern Louisiana, and violence against them was extremely common.
2. As a young adult, **William came to faith in Jesus and experienced a call to ministry.** After surviving a bout of smallpox that left him scarred in the face and blind in one eye, he attended a bible school in Houston, Texas. Because of strict segregation laws, he was forced to sit outside the classroom full of white students and listen to the teaching from the hallway. Yet despite the significant challenges William Seymour faced, he obediently walked forward into what he felt God was calling him to.
3. In 1906, **William was invited to speak at a church in Los Angeles.** When he told the congregation that he believed that when the Holy Spirit came, people could be released to pray in tongues, he was literally locked out of the church. Undeterred, William began preaching to a small group of people in the home he was staying at. Through those meetings, God's spirit was poured out in a wondrous way. People began falling to the floor, speaking in tongues, and experiencing what could be described in **no other way but revival.**
4. Word spread and soon hundreds of people black and white gathered, spilling out of the house and on to the porch. Prayer meetings took place around the clock. There were so many people, that the floor of the house gave way and the revival meetings had to be moved elsewhere. **Under William's leadership, the group moved to a barn on Azusa Street, and there,** William Seymour led his ministry through an increasingly more significant outpouring of the Holy Spirit. This phenomenon would come to be known as the **Azusa Street Revival**, and what God began there would impact the church around the globe. The revival gave birth to a number of church movements that believed that God moved today through his Holy Spirit in significant ways, including Pentecostalism, and other charismatic movements like the Association of Vineyard Churches, and eventually Blue Ocean Faith.
5. **William Seymour was used by God in an amazing and unexpected way.** He did not set out to change the history of the people of God. By all reports, William was an extremely humble man, who would preach behind a stack of boxes or with a paper bag over his head, because he didn't want people to be distracted by him, or his wandering blind eye. But God was pleased to use William not only to bring a fresh wave of his Holy Spirit, but to challenge the cultural biases of the day. In a time when blacks were without privilege or advantage, where it was especially dangerous to be a black man, William Seymour became the leader of a movement in the church that would affect myriads of Christian believers: black, whites, Latino, Asian, and beyond.

B. Starting with this story for two reasons:

1. **Pentecost Sunday**, Azusa St. Revival birthplace of pentecostalism, more contemporary move of the Holy Spirit in the global church
2. **Second Sunday in our series on core values of Haven. Today: Diversity.**
 - a) As we say on the graphic:
(1) Makes space for people from a variety of backgrounds

- (2) Includes a multiplicity of **races, ethnicities, different abilities, orientations, gender identities, levels of education, faith backgrounds, worship preferences, political perspectives, ages, levels of belief and doubt, family structures, etc.**
- b) This is appropriate value to be considering on Pentecost
- c) It was really with the **coming of the Holy Spirit that the story of God moved from being mono-cultural (Jewish) to multicultural.**
 - (1) Always the plan.
 - (a) Genesis 12:2 - 3

“I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. 3 I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”
 - (b) Jesus’ great commission: “go make disciples of all nations”
- (2) This began with Pentecost and the gift of languages: The Spirit of God is multi-lingual, and multi-cultural. The Spirit coming was about more than cool, supernatural experiences of God.
 - (a) **Why the gift of languages?** On the one hand, it’s easy to say that this was about communication, but it’s not quite so simple. In this era, people throughout the known world had **common languages**. Specifically, at this period of the Greco-Roman empire, Greek was the lingua franca, or common language. It wasn’t that the Palestinian Jews needed the gift of languages in order to communicate with folks from all over the world who were gathered there. There was something deeper, more nuanced going on.
 - (b) When the Spirit of God came that day and caused people to miraculously praise God in languages that were foreign to them, it went beyond pure communication. By translating praise to all of these native tongues, the Spirit of God was breaking cultural barriers. The Spirit of God was affirming very diverse people groups. And he was doing it by communicating not through the only language people understood, but by choosing the language of their native cultures. **He used the language not just of their minds, but of their hearts.** The languages they first spoke as tiny children. The languages of their dreams.
 - (c) To hear the praises of this God of the Jews proclaimed not in Hebrew, not in Aramaic, not even in Greek, but in their native tongues would have been a profound experience. These are the folks who were the non-majority culture amongst Jews. The burden of the cross cultural work for inclusion in the people of God is on them. And in one fell swoop as the Spirit of God comes and brings worship in every cultural expression a new era was born. An era where God seemed to be taking the initiative to speak the language of diverse hearts and dreams.
- (3) Continued throughout the early church and the implications were significant

II. Acts 8:26-40

26 Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” (This is a wilderness road.) 27 So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship 28 and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. 29 Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.” 30 So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

31 He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. 32 Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:
"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

33 In his humiliation justice was denied him.

Who can describe his generation?

For his life is taken away from the earth."

34 The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" 35 Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. 36 As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" 38 He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. 39 When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. 40 But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

A. Who was this guy?

1. **Ethiopian. Dark skinned African.** For those in the GrecoRoman world, **this was the "ends of the earth"**. Southernmost point they were aware of. Just a few chapters after Jesus had told his followers, ***"But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."***(Acts 1:8) 7 chapters later, that is happening.
2. Treasurer of the Queen.
 - a) powerful man. Chief treasurer of kingdom known for its smelting, gold mining, trade.
3. Eunuch.
 - a) custom for servants entrusted with a lot of responsibility to be eunuchs. Usually castrated at a young age against their will.
 - b) also forbidden by the Jewish law in worship
 - c) Deuteronomy 23:1 ***"No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord."***
 - d) closest equivalent today - Someone who is transgender, Gender non-binary, or GenderQueer - someone who doesn't fit the norms in terms of their sexuality or gender identity
 - e) in the past that would have excluded them. Perhaps he knew that? And yet he came anyway on a pilgrimage to learn about and worship the God of Israel

B. What happens?

1. Eunuch is reading the text on his chariot ride back home. Presumably. he has been turned away from worship in the temple, and yet, his quest continues.
2. Philip senses the spirit encourage him to approach him
3. **Their dialogue is a series of questions.** We don't have recorded testimony. We have the two of them sharing their questions. The Spirit makes declarative statements, as does the Scripture, but both Philip and the Eunuch only speak in questions. Why is that?
4. Often this story is presented as Philip the evangelist, the Eunuch the converted. But is it that simple?
5. **Two people who are each on a spiritual journey;** trying to connect with God. In their questions, perhaps each is "converted". In a centered-set framework, **each of them has**

their arrow turned more toward Jesus. As they share their questions and dialogue, the Spirit is at work in the midst.

6. **For the Eunuch, he comes to learn about the person of Jesus** and how he is the fulfillment of all that God has been doing through the people of Israel for generations
7. **For Philip, he is challenged in his understanding of who is now included.** What are the implications of this Jesus-centered faith he is now a part of? How does the gift of the spirit, and Jesus proclamation to share his good news to the ends of the earth challenge and broaden his understanding of who's included?
8. This culminates with the question he poses to Philip after hearing the good news of Jesus. **"Look here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?"** He's sincerely ready to be a part of Jesus' project. But will the church accept him? Or will they prevent him from inclusion, as presumably those at the temple have done?
 - a) Philip can't find an objection. Clearly sense the Spirit at work.
 - b) perhaps confronted with this foreigner and eunuch reading Isaiah, he is reminded of what they would read only three chapters later, if they kept reading:

**(1) "Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say,
"The Lord will surely separate me from his people";
and do not let the eunuch say,
"I am just a dry tree."**

4 For thus says the Lord:

**To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths,
who choose the things that please me
and hold fast my covenant,**

**5 I will give, in my house and within my walls,
a monument and a name
better than sons and daughters;**

I will give them an everlasting name

that shall not be cut off." (Isaiah 56:3-5)

- c) Eunuch sent off rejoicing - connected to his experience
- d) Philip appears at a town that is primarily non-Jewish. Perhaps this encounter was important in his own journey of how God was going to use him.

III. Experiencing more of God in increasingly diverse spaces.

- A. **Studying the Bible with others of other cultures - opens eyes to cultural blind spots.** The view of the woman at the well in affluent Western churches vs. 3rd world churches
- B. **There's a unique experience of God's presence in worship, when our worship reflects God's character in this way.** Led worship in lots of contexts, large and small - almost always the more diverse the crowd, and the more the worship is authentic to that diversity, the more tangible the presence of God. One of the most powerful worship times I've experience - in partnership with a black church in a season in which a majority white church was trying to grow in multiethnicity. As we were worshipping, I heard a sound I'd never heard. Felt like heaven opened and I could hear the voices of angels singing with us.
- C. **Particularly when the oppressed and marginalized are centered, God's presence is powerful.** Reformation Project - particularly time devoted to trans and intersex Christians. Sacredness of their stories and centering them.
- D. All of these experiences have led me to firmly believe that **Jesus is seen more clearly in more diverse spaces** with more perspectives on how we perceive God.

IV. Acts 8 wasn't an isolated incident. First fruits of what was to become the norm.

- A. **Cornelius and the Gentiles** - Holy Spirit coming on a room full of gentiles in a way that Peter and his friends couldn't deny.
- B. **God commissioned Saul/Paul** to bring the good news of Jesus to non-Jewish people. Many diverse churches established
- C. Even this was only a part of the process. End destination is end of the story. John's vision for Revelation.
 - 1. Revelation 7:9-10, ***"After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. 10 They cried out in a loud voice, saying, 'Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!'"***
- D. **In the "now and not yet" of the kingdom we are called to embody this as much as we are able today, even as we wait for it more in its fulness.** Especially in a place as diverse as East Bay, imperative for Haven.
 - 1. **This is where the church is going** - statistics are heading to a church that is not majority white and western.
 - 2. tragic that the **view many have of the church right now is people uninterested in concern for others.** We just look out for ourselves. Our cultural biases adopted as the church's; given spiritual cast. Some think that's what it means to be Christian - to exclude or demean others for their nationality their ethnicity, their gender identity, their orientation.
 - 3. Even in diverse areas, **most churches aren't diverse.**
 - a) A 2011 study in NYC found 130 ethnicities represented in the city's evangelical churches.
 - (1) But **44 percent were mono-ethnic churches** (at least 90 percent of attendees are from one ethnic group) and **89 percent were majority-ethnic churches** (more than half of attendees from a single ethnic group).
 - b) One study: **48% of LGB people surveyed identified themselves as Christians.** Still, very few Jesus-centered churches are fully LGBT inclusive. It's like God is saying, "it's time to I've the eunuchs who have followed my covenant a home", and Christians are saying "just not in our ours".
 - 4. **We need churches, particularly in areas like Berkeley, to embody a diverse expression of the family of God.** This is the family that was first promised to Abraham. This is the family that Jesus came to initiate. This is the family the Spirit empowered at Pentecost. This is the family the eunuch from Ethiopia was a prophetic pioneer of. This is the family John dreamed of when he saw the picture of people from every tongue, tribe and nation worshipping Jesus.
 - 5. **Not just the big categories.** Pursuing diversity means along a wide range of spectrums. When we create family with more kinds of people, we all are reminded that what sets us apart as unique is a gift to this family, our God-given differences to be embraced and celebrated, not shut down and minimized.
- V. How do we live this out? This is the goal of the vision is to call us to deeply consider what it means to **create a space that is not only diverse, but is also Jesus-centered and safe for a diverse group of people.** We'll be continuing to explore this in the weeks to come, but for now, want to start with a few simple tips to consider from Philip and Eunuch.
 - A. **Ask:** Make lots of space for questions and open ended dialogue. regard one another with care and open-minded curiosity, while also respecting one another

- B. **Listen:** Make space for diverse groups of people to share differing perspectives on the scripture, practice of faith, etc. Listen for the Spirit opening up our perspectives, in the same way the spirit was leading Philip and the Eunuch
 - C. **Consider:** Always look with an awareness - what are the barriers to inclusion? What are we missing by not confronting them? "What would keep me from moving toward Jesus...?"
- VI. End by inviting the Holy Spirit to be doing the work of leading us into greater diversity and cross-cultural care and connection.