PRO-AM MISSION

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To be a missionary you need a call; or do you?

If that's the case, then Philip, who we looked at yesterday was a real missionary because he received a call to mission first through an angel and then through the Holy Spirit. You can't get much more called than that (Acts 8:26, 29):

> *As for Philip, an angel of the Lord said to him, â€œGo southÂ down the desert road that runs from Jerusalem to Gaza.â€*
>
> *The Holy Spirit said to Philip, â€œGo over and walk along beside the carriage.â€*

Philip received a call from God, shared his faith with an Ethiopian official (who became a Christian) and then went on to preach in other cities.

But as we saw, yesterday, there is more to Philip's missionary career than this. In the early part of Acts 8 he fled to Samaria to avoid persecution; in today's language, he was a refugee. While he was there, he preached the Gospel and performed miracles and many people became Christians. There is nothing in the text about him being called by God to go to Samaria or about the church sending him there. He went to Samaria to get away from Jerusalem, not to be a missionary, but that didn't stop him preaching.

In one short passage, Philip models two ways in which God gets his message spread around the world. There is the directed, intentional spread of the Gospel through missionaries who go to a specific place, often to do a specific task. In today's world, most of these would be supported and encouraged by mission agencies and churches.

There is also a more random way in which Christianity spreads, through the natural migration of human populations. People move from one place to another for trade, to avoid persecution or for many other reasons and as they do, they take their faith with them. Many students coming to the UK become Christians and return home to places where conventional missionaries would find it very hard to operate openly.

You might call the first group "professional" missionaries while the second group are "amateurs". However, over the last 2,000 years, it is almost certain that the church has spread more through the apparently random movement of populations than it has through the intentional work of "professional" missionaries. Even today, my suspicion would be that it is migrant populations who are responsible for most of the growth of the church worldwide. You might hesitate to call this group "missionaries", but whatever you call them, they play a key role in God's mission.

Now this doesn't play down the role of the "professional" missionary. Â There are some roles that need trained and equipped people and often it is outsider missionaries who first bring Christianity to a place from which it is then spread by the local population as they move around. In truth, the two

modes of transmission complement each other.

A fewÂ of thoughts in closing:

- We need to be more aware of what God is doing through his church around the world and the role of ordinary Christians taking their faith with them as they move from place to place.
- We need to be open to our churches in the West changing as Christians from other parts of the world move here and (hopefully) find fellowship and friendship in our congregations.
- As Christians, we cannot simply view the refugee crisis and immigration as political or economic issues. Most of the people who moving around the world for one reason or another come from profoundly religious societies and we have to be aware of missional opportunities that this provides.