



Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

First Sunday in Lent

February 18, 2018

What's with the Holy Spirit?

Mark 1:9-15

Alyssa-Martin-Nicholas-Jaime-Luke-Cara
Gina-Joaquin-Alaina-Meadow-Helena-Alex
Carmen-Peter-Scott-Aaron-Christopher...

† 17...the youngest were 14 (8); the oldest was 49 --- Each of them loved by family, friends, and peers.

† On the Wednesday, we call "Ash." In Parkland, Florida. Since Columbine, 51 school events, 141 lives lost. Evil, tragic, darkness. And we wonder, we ask, "How could this happen again?" Senseless, horrific tale which compels us to prayer and to action. In a common concern that children of every age are kept safe.

So we dare to pray in hope for a new day; for courage and strength for all who have lost loved ones; for those who live in the aftermath; that we all might act in the days we are given to create and to be communities of care where words are spoken in love and actions enfolded in peace!

††† silence calls us to prayer †††

Lent came quickly midweek; the season of reflective preparation throughout days of worship, devotion, and service. For these days, these Sundays, the Cross is here at the center as we sense and believe anew that we are heirs to the WONDROUS LOVE OF GOD IN JESUS CHRIST.

So, "What's with the Holy Spirit? As Mark begins to set the story of Jesus for the Church, it appears that the Holy Spirit is the agent of action in the first days of Jesus' ministry.

1. Baptism. Jesus moves from Nazareth in Galilee to the Jordan. And there is the first appearance of the Holy Spirit. Up out of the water, heavens torn open, Spirit appears as a dove and the voice: "My Son, the Beloved, I am pleased with you."

Can you imagine it? This man, born of Mary, who taught in the Temple so young and grew up, is set apart to be the presence of God in the world. What must that have been like for Jesus? At least for a moment in time!

2. Testing/Temptation. But wait... "Immediately," the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness. What, no time to rest, to live in the euphoria of the moment? That's not fair!

40 days...tempted by the Deceiver...wild beasts. It is the Biblical image of the test, but it is more than that in Mark's quick telling. No merely "checking out if Jesus has the stuff." A time when the powers of darkness learn anew not to fool around with this Servant of God. Empowered, emboldened, in Luke and Matthew's narrative, this Jesus is Victor with the power of His calling and His leaning into the power of the Word of God. 3 times "It is written" and besting the Deceiver.

"It is written." And "angels waited on him," not at the end but throughout the time. It is so for us!

3. Mission. Spirit- powered, Spirit- led, Jesus is back in Galilee. In the landscape of His mission forward. With the news that is really good. "Time is now, kingdom near, turn around and trust the good news." Simple, clear, calling to know that mission and change are what the Holy Spirit is up to!

Beloved in Christ, we live in a world that is disoriented. And like it is in every time for the Church, we are called, empowered, by that same Holy Spirit to live in pathways of renewal and creative space to grow in Christ.

A week ago yesterday, your Congregation Council meet in what we used to call a "retreat." In our "advance," as we chose to call it, we built a foundation of trust as a new leadership team.

It was far from business as usual as we shared a common commitment to be an active leadership core, caring new paths of how we do mission together in this place and time.

I have three observations on how we found joy and vitality.

1. Baptism. As with Jesus, that is the foundation of the gifts we share and we live in the promise of God and our common commitment to be discipleFit.
Leaders live, leaders serve, leaders risk being engaged to model what ministry looks like in this congregation.

To a person, each servant leader committed to serve in five working groups in the matters of Discipleship with Ben Johnson convening, Vision with Dick Szabo convening, Building with Dick Swaisgood convening, Stewardship with Karen Grams convening, and Leadership Transition with Art Gurtel and Dianne Chong co-chairing. They committed to first months of participation in their groups and with each of the committees and ministry teams to insure that our life together is mission forward in Jesus, committed to be engaged in times of TRANSITION, TRANSFORMATION, TRUST TOGETHER. To listen, learn, and dream of new ways to be used to spread the Gospel in the way we speak and act in the name of Jesus.

2. As with Jesus, we determined that there would be testing and temptation in our leadership. The concern and need to be clear in the ways we address the broad base of membership in a congregation that is healthy and seeking to continue to be so in times of change. To move along the paths of leadership transition and growing need to be in mission in a creative and Spirit led manner.

I have often said that "when things are swell, things can to (hell) rack and ruin." We must be deliberate in dwelling in the Word, discerning the direction that God has for us as individuals and as a community. Not resting on our perceived excellent ways in mission, resting on our laurels, and making an icon/idol out of the successes, but discerning, through courage and humility that our work is urgent and our ministries valued because they are not ours, but God's.

3. A time of unique sharing occurred with the "Prouds." A week prior we had been asked to note 5 "Prouds" about the congregation we grow and serve together in...5 times around the table with Jean checking in from Tanzania. A rich mosaic of the strengths we share and grow in... not deficit, waning ministry, energy diminished, lulls in mission, but a deep affirmation on the foundation of gift and relationship we share in the days ahead.

This much is clear...we are a people of vision, moving forward in times when it sometimes seems difficult, when the world is often dark, when fear locks us in times of violence, truth untold, anxiety robbing of us the hope that the gift of Easter brings---even as we live Lent.

It is now that we are called out by the Holy Spirit to move in the unity that has marked us from the first days in 1956---with clarity---in loving support of one another---in a growing sense that the days ahead are moving us into the places where covenant promise to the likes of Noah, Abraham and Moses, are affirmed through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus finds fulfillment and continuation. And, with the energy of the Holy Spirit, we know for sure and forever that we are what's up with the Holy Spirit.

Over these past difficult days, we have heard a phrase that captures and motivates us. "If you know something, say something." Beloved sons and daughters of God, we know something and need to say something by the witness of our lives in Christ. When God is for us in Christ, no things can overwhelm or domesticate/control our lives and witness.

So, for the time being, I will add that a 4th Point is needed, HEALING. The net result of our mission must always be just the healing of body, mind and soul. For that reason I want to set apart and bless our Healing Ministers as a clear symbol of our Mission...to be wholly, holy in Christ, in all that we do in koinonia, fellowship.

Jan - Karen - Cheryl - Nayna - Jill - Stella - Mikel - Mary - CJ - Doris - Beverley - Misty (12)

A Prayer of Commitment and Blessing

Our lives propelled forward by that priceless grace, blood, death, word WHICH IS LIFE AND LIGHT AND LOVE --- That priceless grace is life for us! Finally, redeemed, made whole. In Jesus' name, it will always be so, AMEN.