

Oregon City United Methodist Church
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Series: The Wesleyan Path

Sermon: Quadrilateral - Vivified by Experience

Romans 8:1-11, 16-17

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, 2 because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. 3 For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

5 Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. 6 The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. 7 The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. 8 Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

9 You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. 10 But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. 11 And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Sermon

So I'm standing in line at a department store customer service desk, all I have is a simple question. There is a placard on the counter with the customer service number, next to a phone, next to the service representative. I'm fourth or fifth in line, waiting my turn. And it's taking forever. Not because of the people in front of me, but because the phone continues to ring and ring and ring. And every time it rang, she stopped wherever she was in the process of helping the people who were there standing in front of her to answer the question of the person on the phone. The person on the phone had priority.

Have you been there? You'd get the one index finger meaning, "hold on a minute." Numerous times while we, who took the time to come on down, had to wait. After a while, it got to be ridiculous. So I got my phone out, in line, called the number on the placard, and her phone rang. She did the one finger "wait" sign to the guy two people ahead of me. I quietly asked my question, trying not to look conspicuous. I got my answer and hung up. And then she saw me and she knew what I did. I got a little glare, like I cheated the system. She put the placard down on the counter so no one else could call. All I could say was, "Apparently that's the only way to get your attention." Sometimes, you need to be creative to get someone's attention.

God uses strange ways to speak to the hearts of people. The Bible is filled with story after story in which God used unusual methods and means to get the attention of certain people. Consider the following cases: Moses had to have a burning bush. Balaam got a talking donkey. Elijah had a still small voice. Peter got a rooster to show

his denial. Jonah got a whale. This list could go on for quite a while, but those few instances are enough to prove my point. God will use whatever means necessary to penetrate the heard heart of humanity with the message he wants a person to hear.

This morning, we continue our look at the Methodist Quadrilateral. There are four lenses in how Methodists do theology. We use Scripture as our primary source of discovering the divine. We also use Tradition - the testimony of others throughout the ages. We also utilize reason - does our faith make sense, in today's day and age? And today, we'll take a brief look at another wall of our theological room - Experience. What has been your experience? What is the Holy Spirit doing today?

In Paul's Epistle to the Romans, he meticulously goes about dividing the Spirit and the Flesh. Those of the flesh do this, those of the Spirit do that. The reward of the flesh is death. The reward of the Spirit is Life. The dangers of the flesh are such, the joys of the Spirit are this. Paul is not a big fan of flesh, but loves the Spirit. That was his experience. And it is the Spirit's job to bring us to the Father. The Spirit makes us aware of God's presence. Karl Barth, one of the celebrated theologians of the last century, was asked to explain the Spirit in high falutten Theological terms. He thought about it, and then said, "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so." To be honest, I prefer the old language - it wasn't always called Holy Spirit, but the Holy _____. In the olden days, Spirit and Ghost meant the same thing - other worldly. But in recent generations, ghosts has taken to mean dead folks still walking around - but Spirit remains still kind of pure. Even the Catholic Church changed from Ghost to Spirit a while back - saying that the word Ghost came from the German, and Spirit from the Latin. But I still prefer Ghost, not because of any spooky connotation, but it sounds more mysterious and mystical - and I think the world needs a little bit more mystery in matters of the soul.

So what is the Holy Ghost, Spirit doing today? What is our experience of God? Many times we look to our own abilities when we need to understand that God has given us a helper in our walk with Him. He gave of Himself in the person of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said that He was not only a comforter but also a helper.

So I'm just going to spitball a few of the tasks in the Holy Spirit's to do list.

First, it is the Holy Spirit which helps us with our daily Christian walk. This is the God around us. The Holy Spirit tries to lead us in our daily walk. It's job is to lead us to Christ. To make us aware of God's presence in the world. He never forces us, He gently leads us. Guiding us this way and that. As Paul told us, "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons (and I'll add daughters) of God." The Spirit opens up the doors for us that we might be led into the household of faith, leading us to Christ so that we can receive Him as our personal Saviour. It was the Spirit that touched my heart that made faith possible. I still remember sitting in that chapel and having my heart "strangely warmed" as Wesley put it. The Spirit moves us to Christ.

Another thing that the Spirit does: He will cause fruit to come into our lives. You might have heard the fruits of the Spirit from Galatians: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control - against such there is no law. These are the marks that show how powerful the Spirit is within your heart. If you lack patience, self control, or any of these fruits, maybe its time for a Spirit check.

The Holy Spirit also gives us strength for each day we face. Strength for the Day. This is a common prayer for many. Lord, let me get through this day with grace and peace. You know John 3:16: For God so loved the world, right? I like Ephesians 3:16, for it gives a good definition of the Spirit: I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being. It is the Holy Spirit that gives our spirit the strength to face: Life, The trials of Life, The enemy (temptations), Our work, (our calling); the

disappointments and also the victories.

The Holy Spirit also helps us to remember the Word of God. Out of the Gospel of John: But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. I know that many times the Holy Spirit brings thoughts and scripture to my mind when I am preaching that I never planned to use. And maybe the Spirit has aided you in your conversations with folk to bring about understanding or peace. Or ideas when crisis arise.

What do I think that the Spirit does? In short, He can create in us a life to serve the Lord. From Acts, after the Resurrection, the words of Jesus: But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. The Spirit awakens within us the Spirit of God that we all have. And we can be witnesses and share that testimony throughout our lives. That's the experience Wesley was talking about. Knowing God and making God known through our everyday lives.

And sometimes, the Spirit works in mysterious ways. Where, for whatever reason, the world just works out. I remember my very first mission trip that I was in charge of. I had been on dozens of trips with a large church where I was a youth worker, but this is one where I was in charge as pastor at a new church. They'd never done a mission trip before and we went to Chicago with about a dozen kids. After the week, driving home, I was fretting just a little bit, we were \$800 over budget. Maybe we shouldn't have gone to Wrigley to see the Cubs lose earlier that week. On this Sunday afternoon going home we stopped at McDonalds about 60 miles from home, to have our final meal as a group. They had bonded wonderfully - everything I wanted in a mission trip - the start of something cool. We eat at Mc'd's, and I go out to the 15 passenger van to start it and get the AC going. But it doesn't start. It turns over, but nothing. I turn it over again, nothing, but this time I get the smell of Gas. I tried one more time, and now I get a large gas smell - and a guy is running at me from across the parking lot waving his arms in the air, STOP! STOP! Turns out, a fuel line broke, and when I was turning it over, gas was just spewing under our van, now a nice sized puddle. Great, I broke the van and we could blow up. I go back inside and tell the kids and my wife, the other sponsor, that we're stuck and we might have to have all their families come get us. I go back out to the van, sat in the drivers seat with the door open (the gas was soaked up by the gravel parking lot by then). Put my head on the steering wheel and had a short part prayer, part pity party. Oh God, now what do I do? That's when I heard a voice, Hey Mike! A vehicle had pulled up beside me. It was a pastor friend of mine who lived 100 miles from us - he was chair of the committee that voted me in as pastor just a year before. Now remember, we were in another state 60 miles away from our church, and 160 miles away from his church. And he was driving an empty 15 passenger van. He left his home that morning, borrowing his church's van, to help move his mom to Iowa. And he was on his way home, driving right by our church on the way. Sometimes Prayers and Pity Parties get answered. The very minute I needed a 15 passenger van, one shows up. Our kids loaded up with him, Steph went with, and I waited for a tow truck. Coincidence? Maybe, maybe not. The tow truck took me and the van back to the rental place 60 miles back to home, Budget Rent a Car were closed, being Sunday. The next morning, I went to settle up, and because of the fuel leak and hassle, they gave us a \$825 credit. We were now within a couple dollars of budget. Coincidence? No. The Spirit moves. Truth be told, the Spirit hasn't stopped me from getting into trouble, but time and time again the Spirit has helped me get out of trouble.

What's been your experience? We share in sufferings, but we also share in Glory, sayith Paul. May the Spirit find us, and use us, to bring Christ into the world. Romans chapter 8 is a tough read between flesh and spirit, but I also like how it ends: Romans 8:31 What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? May we experience God this week, through the Spirit, and find the fruit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And the family of God said: AMEN.