

Mission First

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Acts 1:3-4,8, 2:1-13

CHILDREN'S TIME

See these strips of ribbon hanging here? Now keep your eyes on this ribbon. (blow on the ribbon) What is making the ribbon move? My breath? How do you know? Can you see my breath? If you can't see my breath, how do you know that my breath is making the ribbon move?

A couple of weeks ago we had a strong wind storm. Do you remember that? If you looked outside during that storm you would see bushes, trees, flowers bending and whipping around in the wind. Even though we couldn't see the wind, we knew that it was blowing because we saw things move.

Sometimes we can't see things, but we know that they are there. You knew that my breath was there, even though you didn't see it, because it made the ribbon move.

Love is like that too. Does your mom and dad love you? You can't see or touch love, but you know

that they love you because of what they do and how you feel.

Have you ever seen God's Spirit, the Holy Spirit? No? I haven't either. Even though we can't see the Holy Spirit, the Bible says that the Holy Spirit is always with us and around us.

It's just like the wind — we know it is there even though we can't see it with our eyes. But we know that the Holy Spirit is with us, because we have love inside us and know that people around us love us.

There are a lot of ways we can see the Holy Spirit's work, we just have to notice. Everywhere there is love in the world, the Holy Spirit is there.

SERMON

Have you ever landed a job that you were totally geeked about? You were so geeked that you got there early on the first day and before talking with anyone, you just started doing any old work that seemed interesting and fun to you?

No, of course not! That wouldn't make any sense. Instead, what you do first is talk with the boss to get direction, get the priorities, catch the spirit of the work that

needs to be done. Then you go about doing that work.

I'm going to begin the Pentecost scripture this morning a bit earlier than typical, in chapter 1, to give us some context.

READ Acts 1:3-4

In chapter 1, Jesus is talking with the disciples before he exited the scene. He told them not to make plans, not to head out to do anything yet. He told them to hang tight in Jerusalem.

Why? Well, God had yet to lay the ground work upon which the disciples would be working. God had yet to give them the mission that they would be carrying out and the power to accomplish that mission.

Jesus told them not to start the work before they knew in what spirit the work needed to be done. Jesus told them not to put the cart before the horse! (See the cover of the bulletin.)

Jesus told his closest friends that they were to wait for the gift, the promise, that God was going to give them before doing anything else. Of course he was talking about the Holy Spirit!

But before the Holy Spirit came, Jesus gave them the big picture in verse 8 of chapter one.

READ Acts 1:8

This is the big picture. The disciples of Jesus will be witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. But the details about how they were to do this and in what spirit they would do this were still unknown.

In fact, they were not yet inspired to do the work that God was going to call them to do. They were not yet ready.

So, Jesus told them to hang tight — to stay put where they were and perhaps to ponder the big picture and wait on God to act first.

They have a sense for where God was leading them — out from Jerusalem — but they needed to trust that God would provide the mission and empower their action!

Several weeks ago, I was sitting in our Intentional Restart Team and we were talking about organizational things involving the future with our second pastor, and I have to admit that I was working hard to figure out what the future

will look like, and it was getting a bit frustrating.

During the closing prayer, it came to me — you might say that I was inspired. We know the big picture — we are to be God’s Church, carrying love with us and developing authentic relationships with people in the surrounding community. This part is clear.

What has not yet, although is beginning to crystalize, is the specific mission. What is our WHY?

What I heard during that prayer was “Mission First.” Once the mission is clear, all the structure, all of the activity, all of the plans, even all of the relationships follow inside that mission.

So, let’s read about how the mission of the early church was jump started.

What happened after Jesus told the disciples to hang tight in Jerusalem? They replaced Judas with Matthias among the Apostles and they continued to hang together in Jerusalem waiting for what God promised.

READ Acts 2:1-13

This is truly a remarkable story! I would love to have been in that room!

God acted through the Holy Spirit and the initial reaction was confusion. The people were wondering about the new thing that was happening. They had to ask themselves how this new thing that was happening fit into their world. How did they understand it all? What did it mean?

What happened next? Immediately, in the middle of this confusion, Peter, empowered for the first time by God’s Holy Spirit stood up to give it context. He retold the story of faith and how Jesus fit into their story. He helped people understand what God had done in the past and was currently doing.

The masses of people responded and it says that 3,000 people became believers that day. They were baptized and also received the Holy Spirit.

Before any of them knew what was happening, before any strategic plan was created, BAM! The ministry of the early church had begun, and it was moving in ways unfamiliar and uncomfortable for the disciples.

How many of you watched the Royal Wedding yesterday between Harry and Meghan?

What an amazing event. Several things struck me related to the growth and quality of the early Church.

First of all, Meghan Markle, a bi-racial American descended from slaves, is from the outside of English culture and tradition. She is now being included!

What she brought to the ancient English tradition is a simplicity and even humility that was demonstrated by her simple wedding dress, and lack of bling.

The service was held, not in the larger and more regal Westminster Abby where so many royal weddings have been held, but in the smaller and more intimate St. George's Chapel in Windsor.

The diversity of those included also made a statement that is akin to what we find in the book of Acts as the Church grew to include those who had been excluded in the past. The wedding included wonderful racial diversity, reflecting Meghan's bi-racial ancestry. The black choir from England sang the American

song "Stand By Me" which I think has already gone viral on YouTube.

Then, there was the black Bishop Michael Bruce Curry from the United States who gave a vigorous and animated wedding message, unique among all royal weddings. He even quoted Martin Luther King Jr. and spoke of slavery as he delivered a message anchored in the way of God's love that has power to change the world.

After the wedding, Bishop Curry said that Harry and Meghan were already living the message of how love can change the world — he only gave it language. Beautiful!

As I watched the royal wedding, I was thinking that a picture of God's Church was being revealed with great diversity. It was a breath of fresh air perhaps blown in by the Spirit of God. And perhaps there were some feathers ruffled due to the traditions that were broken.

But I wonder, what is now available from the new thing that was started? We can only imagine. But something different is coming — we know that for sure!

This was much like the Spirit of God moving at Pentecost.

We don't understand the ways of the Holy Spirit. In fact, the Holy Spirit is described like the wind that blows where it will and cannot be controlled by anyone.

As we read through Acts, again and again we see Peter, Paul and others act "in the Spirit" or "with the Spirit." The movement of Jesus' followers is clearly being led by the Spirit of God.

As it was for the first Christians, our job is not to run out and do whatever seems right to us, but to be witnesses to what the Spirit is doing, recognize it, point to it, articulate it (like Peter did) and open up the space for others to join in the Spirit's work.

This past month or so has been really exciting for me, because I have been seeing God's Spirit inspire people in teams that are looking at the congregation's future.

I'm talking about the Intentional Restart Team, the Pastor Search Team, The Music Search Team, and the Church Council, which you might know has shifted its focus from church management to future visioning.

This past month or so has truly been fun! It is a bit messy for sure,

but inspiration has been building from team to team as I share between teams how the Holy Spirit has been leading us. We are finding a new life of ministry in our role in God's work.

The week before last, we had a coaching call with the leaders of these teams and things developed further. While it is certainly not fully clear, the mission to which the Holy Spirit is leading this congregation is beginning to crystalize.

I'd like to end with a quote from renowned author and mentor of Scott Moore's: Henri Nouwen. After the leadership coaching call, Scott went to his old notes from when he spent time with Nouwen. This quote from "Reaching Out" seemed to resonate with how the Holy Spirit is leading us. This led our devotion at the last Church Council meeting.

Does this resonate for you?

"Hospitality means primarily the creation of free space where the stranger can enter and become a friend instead of an enemy. Hospitality is not to change people, but to offer them space where change can take place. It is not to bring men and women over to our side, but to offer freedom not disturbed by dividing lines."