

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

East Moline, Illinois

Pastor Becky Sherwood

June 2, 2024, The 2nd Sunday After Pentecost/The 9th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Psalm 139: 1-6, 13-18, Galatians 5:16-26, 6:1-2 The Message

Sermon Series: Come Holy Spirit— The Fruit of the Spirit—Living in the Spirit.

During the last four weeks we have been moving and breathing with the Holy Spirit, exploring this part of God's love in our lives

The Spirit moves and breathes in our lives, in times of chaos, just like in those first moments of creation, the Spirit brings calm and creativity into our chaos.

The Holy Spirit breathes new life into our lives, just as the Holy Spirit breathed into creation and creatures and the first men and women.

The Spirit descended like a Dove over Jesus as he rose out of the waters of baptism in the Jordan River, and God's voice declared from Heaven, "This is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

Through the love and voice of Jesus, we too are named children of God, and asked to take that truth into our hearts and lives.

Can there be any better news than knowing that we are loved by our fathering and mothering God?

At the end of his time on earth Jesus told his followers that it was necessary for him to ascend to Heaven so that God could send the Holy Spirit to live in their hearts. In the mystery of that first Pentecost that our children helped reenact two Sunday's ago, a rushing wind from Heaven filled the house where they were staying and tongues of fire filled the house and a tongue of fire alighted on each of their heads and the Holy Spirit made a home in each of their hearts. Then through the power of the Holy Spirit they were able to speak in all the languages of those gathered in Jerusalem and everyone heard the amazing story of the Love of God who came to earth in Jesus to save all the world from their sins and bring them home to the Love of God.

In our baptisms through the love of Christ, the Holy Spirit makes a home in our hearts. We are called to revel in the amazing news that the Holy Spirit of God lives in our hearts.

Not because we choose God, but God chooses us, we are never alone!

The Holy Spirit who brings peace and comfort, joy and help,
defends us and is our friend who lives inside our heart!

Together with God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit we are surrounded by the unceasing love of our God.

But that is not the end of the story, it is the beginning of the story. In this morning's reading from Galatians, we hear that God who has made a home in our hearts and lives has an expectation for how we live the life of faith. These lists from Paul aren't historical lists for just the New Testament times, they are lists for us to hold up to the lives we are living, to ask ourselves if we are living God's ways with the Holy Spirit living in our hearts.

In the first part of the reading there is a list that deals with choosing to live a life that only looks inward to one's own selfish needs and wants. Paul calls these the works of the flesh. Paul spoke clearly about people who put their own sexual needs first, both inside and outside of marriage and committed partnerships, destroying the beautiful gift of sex and sexuality that God has given to all people.

Then you can tell that things inside the church in Galatia weren't going well because he

focuses a lot on people that choose to disrupt peace and harmony around them. But these words in Galatians call us to ask ourselves how we live inside our church and inside our relationships in our families and friendships and community.

He says works of the flesh are those that cause strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissension, factions, divisions, and envy inside the church and in daily life and relationships. Paul is turning a mirror on us.

Then he adds drunkenness and carousing and wild partying.

Its fair to say that human nature hasn't changed much in 2000 years.

Paul goes on to say there is a contrast to living this way. What God's Holy Spirit wants to do is grow in us so we are like fruit trees growing beautiful fruit, the fruit of the Holy Spirit. As you listen to this list, I invite you to think about people you know whose lives show the fruit of the Holy Spirit. Who comes to mind when you hear the words as I read them slowly: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control?

Paul writes that if we live by the Holy Spirit in our hearts then we should be guided by the Spirit as we grow the fruit of the Spirit in our lives.

I have two stories I'd like to share this morning about people who live by the Spirit and grow the fruit of the Spirit. One I shared with you years ago that bears retelling, and one was shared with me by a colleague and friend.

One of the professors at my seminary was the Rev. Dr. Samuel Moffett. I got to know him and his wife Eileen my senior year after returning from my internship in Northern Ireland, when I began attending their gathering for international students. Dr. Moffet and his wife Eileen were world renown missionaries to Korea, and two of the kindest, most joyful, faith-filled, generous people I've ever met. They helped students who were so far from home, from around the globe, feel so welcome and heard. Dr. Moffett's father before him had been a Christian missionary to Korea beginning in 1890 and their family's love and commitment to Jesus and spreading the good news of the gospel was generational. Dr Moffet and Eileen's love for Jesus and caring for young people training to be ministers helped shape who we were.

That year one of my other professors told a group of us a story about the Moffet's generosity that has always stayed with me. As you can imagine, a Princeton Seminary professor makes a good salary. Dr. Moffet and Eileen gave away so much money to mission every year that every single year the IRS audited them. They were always sent a young agent, a different one every year, and the Moffett's saw this conversation with the IRS agent who was sent to their house as a time to share their faith and beliefs about giving to others. They always made a fresh pot of tea and homemade cookies and then explained why they chose a simple lifestyle so they could give away so much to those in need and to the furthering of the Good News of Jesus. This story just increased my love for these two wise faith-filled people who helped shape my faith my senior year.

When someone is growing the fruit of the Spirit in their life and we get to be witnesses to it, it shapes our lives and helps us make decisions for how we want to live, doesn't it?

My dear friend Judy, who lives in Duluth, told me a story of a wintry Sunday at one of her churches which was about two hours northwest of Duluth. I invite you to pray for Judy, as this past Friday she retired after 40 years as a Lutheran pastor and she is starting to unwind from that life. I zoomed with her yesterday and she said she kept finding herself making sure she had everything ready for Sunday and then realized she didn't need to. This is a story she told in one of her sermons, and I asked to borrow it.

It was a bitterly cold Sunday morning in January, and Lynn wanted to go to church. She hadn't been involved in a church, but something moved her that morning to get up and go. She couldn't convince her husband or two older sons to join her, but she dressed her 6-month-old baby, and bundled them both into the car. She went to the neighboring church where her older son went for *an after-school program* (Release Time) on Wednesdays. She got baby Samantha out of her car seat, grabbed the diaper bag and headed into the building.

As she entered, an usher stopped her at the door. "We're having communion today," he said, "and only members can receive it." Lynn was stunned. "What?" she said.

"In our church, only members can take communion."

Lynn turned away and started to cry. "You're still welcome to sit through the service," the usher called after her.

But Lynn had heard enough. She packed her baby into the car, started the motor, rested her head on the steering wheel, and wept.

All she wanted was to go to church, and now she was turned away.

But friends in Christ, here is the miracle and the power of the Holy Spirit – she did not go home, and vow to never enter a church ever again, though she had plenty of reason. Instead, she drove down the road to the next church, which was Bethel-Trinity Lutheran in Bovey.

Again, she got her baby out of her car seat, grabbed the diaper bag and headed into the building. As she entered, the first person she met was Ruth. Ruth said, "Welcome," and gave Lynn a hug.

"What a beautiful baby! If you like, I'll hold her while you get your coat off." And as she took off her coat, Lynn's eyes once again filled with tears but this time they were tears of relief and of the unexpectedness of grace.

Meanwhile, Ruth took baby Samantha around and introduced her to the rest of the congregation.

Judy writes: That is a true story, which I only heard some years later.

Judy continues: Ruth was the face of Jesus for Lynn that day. Ruth was Bethel-Trinity's unofficial church hugger, and she made sure that everyone who came through the door – friend or stranger – knew that they were welcomed. Ruth wasn't just friendly with her friends – which even non-believers can do – but Ruth gave her love to everyone who walked through the door of that church.

A few years later, Ruth died of a brain tumor. At her funeral, Judy told everyone that story, and how Ruth would be the official heaven hugger, and that everyone from now on who died would be welcomed into God's Kingdom with a Ruth hug. At the funeral lunch, the members of Bethel-Trinity made a promise - since Ruth was no longer around to greet everyone who came into the church, they would now all be Ruth.

When we get to see the fruits of the Spirit grow on their trees it helps us grow. The Holy Spirit of God is all around us and in us, calling us to live the life God calls us to live. The Rev. Thom Shuman puts it this way:

"Not content to sit back and rest on her laurels of moving upon the face of the waters at Creation, she the Holy Spirit continues to move in our midst.

A dove, the Spirit pushes and pulls us towards the role of peacemakers;

a flame, the Spirit keeps trying to light a fire under us and get us moving out of our comfort zones;

a mighty wind, the Spirit would knock us off our self-imposed pedestals of grandeur and send

us face first into the muck and mire of the world where we will work alongside Jesus in service to others;

a whisper, the Spirit would sing us songs about the fresh, new ways of being God's people, so we can go out and sing them to others.

May we be reminded of the presence, the power, the peace of the Spirit in our midst this day.”

Thursday, March 14, 2013, “Habemus Spiritus Sanctus” The Rev. Thom Shuman, written following the election of Pope Francis

Beloved children of God, may we grow in the fruits of the Spirit, so that others will be invited to grow and be nurtured in the life of faith. Oh, how we are loved, the Holy Spirit lives in our hearts, now let us go out and give that love away! Amen