

**“When God Moves In”  
Rev. Thomas Bartha  
Sunday, May 17, 2020**

**Call to Worship**

(from Psalm 67)

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us,  
that thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving power among all nations.

**Let the peoples praise thee, O God; let all the peoples praise Thee!**

**Prayer of Confession**

**Gracious and Holy God, you speak into your world, yet so often our listening is inattentive. You are as close as our breathing, yet we fail to acknowledge your presence or respond to your promptings. We seek your forgiveness...**

**Yet beyond that, O God, we pray that you renew and inspire us by your Spirit; that we would live in obedience and gratitude in the strength you provide. We pray this is Jesus' name. Amen.**

**Words of Assurance and Forgiveness**

**(selected Scripture)**

John 14:15-21

"When God Moves In"

This afternoon, like many a Sunday, most of you will be listening to the great blues singers you love so much: Albert Collins, Mississippi John Hurt, Marcia Ball, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Rory Block, Honeyboy Edwards...

If you listen carefully to your old Jimmy Reed recordings, you will hear, ever so slightly in the background, a woman's soft voice, whispering in advance the lyrics of each verse. Legend has it that this was Jimmy Reed's wife. Jimmy was so caught up in the music that he could not remember the words to his own songs. So his wife prompted him, whispering the upcoming stanzas into his ears as he sang.

Stretch this not too far, and we find a parallel in today's gospel lesson. Jesus is at table for his final meal with his 12 disciples. It is an extended time of teaching, focused upon Jesus' going away. He is leaving and they are downcast. *"I go to prepare a place for you."*

That is of little help. "How will we manage without you? What do we do, where will we go? How will we ever remember all you have taught us?" *"I will not leave you alone,"* Jesus says, *"left to your own devices. I will be with you in an entirely new way. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, (or Advocate, Comforter), to be with you forever."*

In two weeks we celebrate Pentecost--the gift of the Holy Spirit to the church. Whenever the Holy Spirit's name comes up, so do eyebrows. He is intriguing. Some people associate the Spirit only with ecstatic utterances, speaking in tongues, or divine healings. Many have difficulty envisioning who the Holy Spirit is, what He does. He seems sort of pale and shapeless. For the disciples this is entirely new territory. Notice what Jesus does not say: "Friends, I am leaving you. Now, each morning first thing, review all I have taught. Go over the Sermon on the Mount so it stays fresh. John--you get busy and write a book on my life. Call it the gospel--Good News. That way, everyone will have ready access to my words. You will have at your fingertips all the teaching you need, when you need it.

He does not say that. Rather, *"I am going away, but I will not leave you desolate, orphaned. I will come to you. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever."* That little word, "another," means literally, "one like the first." Jesus has been their constant companion through these unforgettable three years. Now, God the Father will send another advocate, counselor, helper, to be with them wherever they are. In effect, Jesus says, one role of the Holy Spirit is to whisper the lyrics of the gospel message into the ears of the faithful.

*"The Holy Spirit will be to you," Jesus tells us, "as I have been to my disciples. There is no loss of power or presence. Wherever you are, the Holy Spirit will be with you." "He will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you."*

When God moves in...he gives the insight and incentive you and I need to live as disciples. Quietly whispering the lyrics, reminding us, prompting us, jogging our memory.

Sometime back there was a television show, where a grandmother came for an extended visit. She moved into the teenage boy's room, who then bunked with his younger brother. After a few weeks, the boy complained to his parents: "Have you seen what Grandma has done to my room? I can barely recognize my own face in the mirror!" That is how it is when God moves in, when the Holy Spirit takes up residence. Wherever you are becomes holy land, sacred ground..

Is that something you will claim for yourself? I pray you will. Quoting a favorite preacher, Fred Craddock: *"Take some time and enjoy and appreciate and live your faith. Do not hurry and scurry. Some of us are not getting all the vitamins and calories from our faith because our lives are too complicated. Live more simply and get rid of junk... Spend some time enlarging the inner world of your life. How can the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit dwell in us if there is no room. Clean out a bunch of stuff and make room."*

Over recent weeks you and I have read and heard a lot about how our world is changing during this pandemic. Many predictions over how things might look. But what about the changes happening in your own soul and spirit? How are you and I evolving during this unprecedented stretch? Set aside some time to think on this. Some changes you might celebrate. Others will have you thinking, "I still have some work to do." This is not intended to be burdensome, or dumping more "Try harder." Not about that. Rather, recognizing and receiving. Everything counts.

The Holy Spirit is not a kind of power that we can turn off and on at will. He is the fullness of Christ dwelling within, and making us more Christ-like. This is a co-operative venture. *"If you love me,"* Jesus says, *"you will keep my commandments."* It is in that obedience that the mind and character of Jesus increasingly becomes our own. There is involvement on our part: telling the truth, serving someone else, making someone's life a little better, fresher and more abundant because you came by, left a note, made a call. It is so easy, and so difficult to do. Over time it becomes a way of life. I mentioned in last Sunday's message a quote from George Elliot that has left a good mark on my soul: *"What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult for each other."*

The Holy Spirit teaches believers what we need to know, and guides us in what we are to do. He grants us the mind of Christ, guiding us into the truth, opening minds and hearts to grasp the deep significance of what God has done for us in Jesus his Son. If you hold a love for Jesus, a desire to serve him and make him known, that is evidence of the Spirit's presence in your life.

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments..." In the Confirmation classes I used to teach, each confirmand was encouraged to find a life verse, and claim it for him or herself. A valuable practice for any of us. I recall one of the confirmands choosing Micah 6:8 -- "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God." My own life verse is Proverbs 3:5-6—"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall make straight your paths." My wife's life passage is Psalm 121: "I lift my eyes to the hills, from whence shall my help come..."

Give thought to finding a portion of God's Word to embrace your days and nights. Speak truthfully, pray often, serve faithfully, and trust that God holds your life firmly in His good hands. With that commitment and obedience, the Spirit's work will be clearer and even more precious..Thanks to our God for this unspeakably gracious gift. Amen.

Let us pray: Come, Holy Spirit. Breathe upon us, stand beside us, enter into us...that we would become the disciples we long to be, following no matter where you lead; all for Jesus' sake. Amen.