

11 May 2011

Take Two

The following is called a Take Two. It is an attempt to expand on some of the things that happened during recent Sunday sermons. That's it.

But, the most interesting sermons are often those that happen in the minds of people in the congregation. So, feel free to respond to this email as you see fit.

Dear Friends (Known and Unknown),

Last Sunday, Mother's Day, I wondered if being a mother is one of those things in life where we are tempted to become hyper-focused on what we are doing and controlling. Are we saving money for our kid's college? Are we making sure all the sharp edges on the coffee table are covered up? Are we raising a "smart kid," or at least a child smarter than the kid down the street?

All of this is good and important. But, sometimes we need to just be in awe and joy at the larger picture. If someone is a mother who has given birth then she is someone through whom the mysterious and wonderful breath of life has flowed. If someone is a mom through adoption, she has modeled the grace of God who adopts us into the family of heaven through Jesus Christ. Wow.

I think being a follower of Jesus can mirror this. I know this sounds a little odd, but bear me out for a moment. If we are trying to follow Jesus, we can become hyper-focused on what we are doing. Am I praying enough? Am I giving enough? Am I forgiving enough? Am I doing compassionate things? Etc.

Wait. Stand back from those important issues for a second. At the end of Luke's gospel Jesus suddenly appears to his friends, his disciples. He should be dead, but he's not. Easter has come. His friends are (a little understandably, I think) terrified.

Jesus patiently tries to settle them down. He tells them they can touch him and be assured that he is not a ghost. He asks for a piece of fish to eat because ghosts don't snack. He wishes them peace, handles their fear and doubts in stride, patiently teaches them that this is the way it's always supposed to have been.

Yet then the gears change in the reading. Jesus, having I suppose settled them down to his satisfaction, lets them know that it's time to focus not on him but upon what will flow through them.

They will be witnesses to his life, death, and resurrection throughout the world. They will proclaim forgiveness and the God-made possibility of turning over a new leaf. The good news will not be made by them, it will flow through them. And first they are to await the promised power from on high.

This power is, of course, the Holy Spirit. It is God's Breath who, in the biblical view of things, formed the universe, who overshadowed Jesus's mother Mary, who raised Jesus from the dead. In a

way, just as the Spirit overshadowed and flowed through Mary, so the Spirit will overshadow them. And in a wonderful way, Christ's life will be born in them.

God knows (literally) what we control, analyze, measure, perform, and do matters. But what is most important is who or what flows through us to others. Is LIFE flowing through us or is it something lesser, darker, not fitting for the friends of Jesus?

It is the conviction of the New Testament that God's Spirit flows through all who follow Jesus – no exceptions. We are simply called wake up to that, rejoice in it, and not block the flow.

I was told last week by some leaders in the congregation about a gift of \$5000 dollars for outreach. I immediately thought of all sorts of worthy uses. (At least I think they're worthy.) Mission Northeast wants to expand a scholarship system for people to receive job training and so better stay out of poverty. If Joni Adams' assessment and counseling ministry becomes reality, the congregation will have the chance to build a support fund to help people without financial means access the service. We have a group of dedicated folks called Feed My Lambs who provide needed food support to a local apartment complex. There are all sorts of blessed things.

My first impulse was to focus on what I could do. How could I manage and control things to get the outcome I wanted? I am the pastor, after all. I know best, of course. 😊

But then I thought of the Holy Spirit's flow through us as a community. I believe that no matter how messed up life seems, if we are seeking to walk with Jesus, God's Spirit is in us, among us, and moving through us to bless others. If I didn't believe that, I couldn't be a minister.

So my hope for the 5K (or 50K or 500K, for that matter) is that we as a congregation will be able in prayer and love to look and see where God's life is already flowing through us into the world and use such a gift to help increase that flow.

Unlike the Mississippi River, there can't be too large a flow of God's Spirit through God's people. When we are helping one another stay open to the flow of Christ through us, then what we do and say takes on more power and meaning than we can imagine.

Peace in Christ,

Robert