

July 29, 2018

Be Filled with the Holy Spirit

Prayer

May the words of my mouth be meditations of our hearts and be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Sermon

The readings for this morning are filled with stories that we're familiar with. I'm sure all of you have heard the story of David and Bathsheba. Not David's finest moment. But it is a story that helps us to know and understand that God uses even flawed individuals for his greater glory. I'm sure you've all heard the story of the feeding of the five thousand many times. Probably heard many different sermons on the feeding of the five thousand. I'll let you later today think about one of those sermons. We also have the ... John puts the feeding of the five thousand and the walking on the water in the story together. So, you have that great story of Jesus walking across the sea of Galilee. The disciples being afraid. But Him calming them down to not be afraid. And I'm sure you've heard many sermons on that. Again, reflect back on one of those.

Because when I was reading those ... All the readings for today what really struck me was the epistle. Paul's letter to the Ephesians. For a couple different reasons. One, earlier this year I taught at our school for ministry on Paul's letters and anytime you teach, you learn. I'm sure I learned more than the students did in rereading Paul's letters and studying about Paul. So, I was intrigued by this prayer that Paul writes to the church in Ephesus.

Also, because within that prayer there are two themes that jumped out at me that we've been dealing with as the Episcopal church some. And certainly, as our men's breakfast group has been studying.

The first is from our presiding bishop, Michael Curry, who often quoted as saying if it's not about love, it's not about God. If you reread that prayer that Paul writes for his congregation in Ephesus. It's about the love of Christ. That overwhelming love of God that led to God acting so that we might know the great love of God. So that we might understand that God's love for us is so complete and so unconditional. That in his love he joins with humanity. That he comes into his creation to embrace us, to teach us, to show us an example of what life can be. When humanity accepts and receives the love of God and returns it to God. Loves God back.

Because that is what the story of Jesus is. It is the manifestation of God's love for each person. Who had been, who was, and who will be. It is a sign and symbol of the love that is God. And Paul tries to remind his congregation about the gospel that he's preached and the gospel of that love. That preaching and teaching that drew people from different lives together. That converted the Jews who heard it and became a part of the church. Because they understand that this God that they have worshiped all their life was such a love of God that it was not enough to have a chosen people out of the world but needed to embrace all of the world.

That it included those people who had heard the teachings from the Jews about the law and about the love of God. To love God and to love one another. And have been drawn to the Jewish faith. And as they heard this new message, this gospel of God continuing to act in bringing the whole world to himself they felt even more included than they had

before. They accepted the gospel. They accepted that invitation to become a part of the community, the ecclesia, the church.

It drew in Gentile pagans who really had different religions, different faiths, different God's that they worshipped. But they heard a message of good news that said the God who is the creator and sustainer of all things loves all of creation. Not just a chosen people from creation. And they were invited to participate in this community as well. To accept and receive the love of God. So that they could be changed. So that they could be part of that community and return God's love. If it's not about love, then it's not about God. And this was all about love and it was all about God.

And so, we need to be reminded of that from time to time. That the most important thing that you can learn from the church is that God loves you unconditionally and completely. And I was trying to think of an image that seemed to show what God's love for you and for me is truly like. And what I came up with is that if you were the only person who was separated from God because of sin. If you were the only one who by your own strength of will could not conform to the law of God. Could not feel, and accept, and receive the love of God. And return it to God. Love God back. If you were the only one God still would have come into creation and joined in humanity. Jesus still would have lived that life in obedience to God. The humanity obedient to the divinity.

And for you and you alone Jesus would have gone to the cross. He would have accepted the punishment for your sin so that that could be taken away. So that you could receive the love of God and live your life differently. Even if it was you and you alone. That's the love of God that is shone in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it was shown for you so that you can know God loves you.

The other theme that I see in this prayer is that theme of being filled with God, with the Holy Spirit. We know and understand from the scriptures and from the church teachings that when we are baptized in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God does something. God unites with us. It is a reflection of what occurred in the life of Jesus. Where the Holy Spirit joined with humanity. In Jesus, it was complete and perfect. In us it is humanity accepting the gift of God. Accepting God himself. We accept the Holy Spirit in our baptism. Because that is God's promise to be with us, to join with us so that we might be changed. So that we might become the children of God. We are adopted. And then as we live our life with the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, then we can be changed. How we see God. How we see the world. How we see one another changes over time as we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us, to guide us in the living of our lives.

In the men's breakfast group on Wednesday morning, we are studying a book called, "Not A Fan." The author is Kyle Idleman. He is the teaching pastor of one very large church in Louisville Kentucky. I'm not sure that I'm a real fan of the book but it has brought us into some really good discussions about the difference between being a fan of Jesus and being a follower of Jesus. And one of the chapters that we've studied talks about being filled with the Holy Spirit. You have the Holy Spirit in you but are you filled with the Holy Spirit. If you have been baptized by the promise of God, the spirit is in you. How much space you allow the Holy Spirit to have in you is up to you. How much you are willing to be open. How much you are willing to ask to be filled.

And it was clear that for our men's breakfast group not many of us have prayed intentionally over and over again that we be filled with the Holy Spirit so that we can be changed. Because let's face it, most of us human beings are pretty happy with who we are. We believe we're trying to follow Jesus and that's a good thing.

But what would it be to be filled with the Holy Spirit on a regular basis. And I have to confess that for me, there are times when I earnestly pray for to be filled with the Holy Spirit and there's times I usually and always on Sunday before I preach. Because my prayer is always for God to fill me with the Holy Spirit, that I can focus only on God. That the that I speak might bear God's message to me and to the people who receive it, who hear it. That the gospel ... That I'm not standing in the way of the gospel being truly preached and truly received.

That's my prayer much through Saturday night. Trust me on that. And always before I preach when I'm standing up here with my back to you as the music finishes, that's what I'm praying. To be filled with God's Holy Spirit. Because I am terribly aware that I have nothing to say to you, but God has a lot to say to you and to me. And that's what I hope these sermons have and it's only by the presence of the Holy Spirit that that is truth that really comes about.

The other times when I earnestly pray to be filled with the Holy Spirit is when I know that I am in a situation where someone is bringing an issue, a question in their life to me as a representative of the church, as a representative of Jesus Christ. And I pray earnestly that I am filled with the Holy Spirit during this time so that I can hear what the person is saying. Beneath the surface, what the person is truly saying and meaning and what is God's response to that is.

It's a matter of asking and knowing from moving beyond the situation that God fulfills that promise and that prayer. I'm never quite sure exactly how well. Sometimes never and sometimes much later. But to be filled with the Holy Spirit as we come into situations that we are not comfortable with. Where someone is expecting something greater than who we are. Is the time to ask for that filling. Because its not for us, it's not for me. It's for the other.

And it's about getting out of the way and letting God show through. And that's not just for priests or deacons or bishops. It's for all of us who are children of God. As we are in relationship with one another. Because that love of God in Jesus Christ that is shown to us – to me, to you. God wants us to reflect that as God's children to one another. To allow God to shine through us. to be vessels of God's love to one another. As we make it through a world that is sometimes very difficult. And takes us on paths that we're not always comfortable with.

I hear in Paul's prayer to the Ephesians a prayer for us all. That we might truly know and understand God's great love for you, for me. And to know that God's great desire is for us to be filled with that Holy Spirit. To reflect that combination of humanity and divinity that was perfect in Jesus. And can be reflected in our own lives so that we might live together in peace. So that we might truly share with one another the love of God.

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