



## Where is the Good News? Holy Spirit!

Sunday May 17, 2020

First Lesson: Psalm 66: 8-20

Gospel Lesson: John 14: 15-21

Sermon Title: **“Where is the Good News?: Holy Spirit.”**

**Most of you who knows me knows that my father passed away over 5 years ago due to pancreatic cancer.**

As a side note yesterday marked him and my mom’s wedding anniversary.... and so it’s funny how my dad has a way of showing up in my thoughts; particularly more so, when certain anniversaries come around such as wedding anniversaries, his birthday...etc.

And so over these past few months **I have revealed to you** all a lot about the last hours that led up to his eventual transitioning...

**I have revealed to you** all how I had the honor of baptizing my dad on a Friday evening when he still was able to speak, see and hear.

**I shared with you all** how on Sunday morning, his physical body gave way to the cancer and it was in that moment that I described the tangible feeling of his spirit floating up into the sky; followed by my innate reaction to try to hold onto it like a helium balloon that floated off .... What I did not share with you, but our gospel today let’s me know that it is time to do so; is the gift that I can now identify as what the Holy Spirit gave me through my father; with the encounters and experiences that my father shared in detail with our family regarding his dying process;

roughly 11 days prior to him entering into home hospice care.

And so let me first just say this; the main reason why I have not shared these details to anyone is admittedly fear of being ridiculed or dismissed.

And folks I am not proud to admit this... but it's true....

Because frankly, from my perspective, we seem to be living in different times where the relevancy of church and God seems to be questioned regularly;

We seem to live in a time where even talking about Jesus can be deemed to be not socially acceptable; perhaps because of having a fear of not being perceived of being inclusive towards others who may not hold the same beliefs;

Or perhaps a fear of being viewed as a person not being in touch with reality.

I really can't name the fear completely but I know that from time to time it's there...fear.

But even in this fear, the calling of a preacher I believe is to preach and teach the gospel in season and out of season....

The calling of a disciple is to be a living witness to others about God always ...

My calling in particular, is to help plant seeds of God's love and Word in spite of.....

But I share my fears as a witness to the world of God working through me in spite of my fears or sometimes reluctance.

Just as I believe God works through all of us in a similar fashion.

Furthermore, when looking at our gospel and the promise that Jesus gave to all of us to leave us an Advocate known as the Holy Spirit; I often felt if I were to speak openly and fluidly about some of these encounters that my father had to the world for instance; I knew that it would be met with a healthy amount of skepticism, criticism or be dismissed as nothing more than a scientific phenomena by some....and to be honest I did not want to have to deal with that type of feedback then.

And now, although that still may indeed be some of the feedback that I do get, I realize that at this point in my spiritual journey, this should not stop me from sharing the

experience nevertheless.

Because what occurred to me in my own faith journey and experiences; along with my theological engagement with scripture, is that there has been this building theme that I have been stating sermon after sermon that describes the human connection with God being lost in translation after the Fall in the Garden of Eden.

And so the call of the church as a whole I believe is to reestablish that connection.

To let the world know that the connection between God and humanity is not lost; it is still very much intact.....

**so journey with me if you would and let's discover how we know that the connection is intact.**

So if you remember, I described a real detectable human/spiritual connection in the story of Adam and Eve revealed in the earlier days where humanity seamlessly seemed to know God's voice and walk with and talk with God regularly.

And then after the described Fall of humanity that can be found in the book of Genesis, the connection between God and humanity has been very murky ever sense; depending on I suppose who you ask.

For the way I see it, there are three detectable groups in the world; those who believe in a higher power that they may call God/Jesus/Holy Spirit or however their embedded theology teaches them to acknowledge and name this entity; the second group is those who do not believe that there is a God or an afterlife; and then you have the group that is somewhere in between. In today's time this group may identify themselves to be spiritual but not religious; where there is a belief of something greater than humanity, but perhaps the individual is not at the theological place to attribute this entity to the Christian terms we tend to use I.e. God, Jesus and Holy Spirit, aka the triune God; whew I just said a mouthful there!

But you see in this mouthful that I just stated, further highlights the complexity of it all and why I was not rushing to share my father's spiritual interactions during his last days on Earth any time soon.

Because in today's world, one might be written off to be nothing more than a religious loon or fanatic.

And it is this type of labelling that tends to keep many

Christians from sharing their spiritual awakenings, revelations and truths; out of fear of being ridiculed, challenged or dismissed altogether.

At least if I am honest, these are some challenges and fears that I have faced;

But the aha moment for me as I bring our gospel to the forefront is that it will be difficult to present to the world an Advocate if those who believe in the Spirit cannot talk about the Holy Spirit...

And the reason why you and I need to talk about the Holy Spirit often is **because it is the Spirit that keeps our connection to God intact.**

Because folks you and I are not just human beings, but we are also spiritual beings.

You and I have skin and organs and all kinds of things that physically we can see and identify....

But I am not so certain that many of us view ourselves beyond much of that.... but I stopped by to say that you and I are just as spiritual as we are human.

You and I were created in the image of God and essentially what that means is that part of our dna (whether it's been directly named or not) includes God's spirit.

So this is why I believe it is important for us to spend time to get acquainted with our spirituality.... because it is another layer of who we are.

**And so with that....let's talk about the Holy Spirit...**

Particularly, how can this passage of Scripture bring any of us some ray of hope or assurance.

And so a couple of weeks ago, I started a conversation about what the voice of God sounds like and I referred to the story of Elijah in the cave, stating that the voice of God was not in the Earthquake or the fire or in the wind, but was in the still quietness.

I talked about this voice being enough to raise Elijah onto his feet and to cover his face with his cloak.

Well to name this, I believe that this was the same Advocate presenting itself in the story of Elijah.

For me the still quiet voice and the Holy Spirit goes hand in hand.

**Now getting back to the story of my day when he entered into home hospice, I believe it was in his last**

**days where I saw the still small voice come alive in a way where I could see it's effect in action.**

And so for me, I have always recognized the still quiet voice within me and over the years learned to rely on it. What I had not experienced before so palpably was the Holy Spirit in action until the experience with my dad in his sickness.

And some might ask, "Kirstie how do you know it was the Holy Spirit."

Well because for starters my dad was not a church going man and to be honest, I was not even certain that he was even a spiritual man until his last couple of weeks on Earth.

Now my dad was a loving person who never met a stranger.

But you could tell that he just wasn't a big fan of religion even though his daughter is a pastor.

Furthermore, My dad I believe only heard me preach once in his lifetime.

The second time I preached in my dad's presence was at his funeral.

So perhaps this is what caught my attention when witnessing what I am about to share about the last two weeks of his life.

I will also say that my dad was not afraid to die. He was very practical about this as well.

His only regrets was not being able to see us anymore. So again the spiritual conversion that I witnessed with my dad was not fear based either.

**So getting on with his story**; as soon as my family got the news that my dad was approaching the end of his life and had to be entered into home hospice; it was sobering to say the least.

My dad was angry and he had so many regrets about not listening to my mom and the rest of us when we would encourage him to eat healthier and to stop smoking.

This feeling though did not last long for my dad; at least he did not express it very long in those last couple of weeks of his life.

But what he did start to express to us (in which I saw then and I see now as a tremendous gift to all of us) was every stage of life transition he was experiencing in detail.

And folks let me just say that my dad had many gifts, but the gift of prophetic and insightful details were not one of them.

He was always one to tell a questionable joke from time to time that one would laugh at, but afterwards would feel guilty for doing so; but the way my dad expressed himself during the last two weeks of his life was fascinating. Folks, my dad was able to give us intimate detail of what his brain was doing and the things he could see and hear without us asking.

He often would tell us that he knew that his time was coming soon but did not describe it as dying, but he used the term fading...he would say, that he could feel himself fading from this world but assured us he was not afraid.

Then out of nowhere he insisted on me baptizing him which was the best moment in the world.

Then it was after he passed that my mom finally shared this piece of information that gave me a sense of joy that I believe has kept me from grieving completely, because I believe that it was a sign from God to let us know that not only would my dad be ok, but we would be ok.

But my mom told me that after I baptized him and I went on to my condo which was across the street from where my parents lived (which was not a coincidence I do not believe in the least...) she said that she found my dad just sitting up in the bed looking perplexed and startled later that night.

When my mom asked my dad what was wrong, she said that he told her, "Les (her name is Leslie,) I just saw an angel."

When my mom shared this with me, she was filled with emotion as was I.

And I said to her, "mom what do you mean...did he say he dreamt it?"

My mom said, " I asked him the same thing and he insisted very clearly that he was awake and he definitely saw an angel."

Keep in mind, at this point my dad was not on pain medication.... meds really didn't come into play until hours later when we fell asleep and we soon learned we would never hear his voice again on this side of the universe at least.

So looking back another gift was being able to hear my dad speak for roughly 12 and a half days of the 14 days he was in home hospice before passing.

So getting back to the story, finally my mother said to him, "Reg, how do you know that what you saw was an angel?"

And his reply was in complete Reggie fashion with his regular feisty self and he said in an incredulous retort...

"Les, I know what an angel looks like!"

And I will add the word afterwards for emphasis..."Duh!"

But here is the thing, a man who normally never talked about God or spiritual things, to be able to express something so heavenly with such assurance and confidence and even with a measure of incredulousness towards my mother to question how she could even doubt this experience; instantly made me rejoice on the inside and celebrate that the human connection with God was still very much real and very much alive!

Not to mention the gift of human detail, to be able to share with us all every thing he was feeling; every sight, every smell, every sound....it was like watching a beautiful film that I never wanted to end.

And why I believe that the Holy Spirit was there to comfort us during that time was because not only do I believe that God was guiding every word, action and thought of my father, but would I sound completely insane to you to suggest that what I thought would be the most painful two weeks that I would ever experience; ended up being the most life-giving moments I have ever had in my entire life! Folks witnessing those last two weeks of my dad's life was a transformational moment I will never forget...

Furthermore my attempt at fully capturing and naming what was happening during that time really doesn't do it the justice it deserves.....

**All I can say is that without a shadow of a doubt, there was an advocate during that time with my dad;**

There was an advocate at that time for us...

And I stopped by to say that there is an Advocate for all of us right now in the present time and in the days to come all ways.

**An advocate** that the Psalmist in our first lesson today alludes to that will not let our feet slip...

**An advocate** that although we may go through fire and

through water as our psalmist tells us;

That will bring us out to a spacious place.

**An advocate** that will make the dreaded two weeks of our lives become the most meaningful two weeks we might ever live...

**Church there is an advocate** that will awaken the spiritual being inside of us that lets us know that there is more beyond the physical realm than what meets the eye..

**There is an advocate** that informs our spiritual selves that we are more than dirt; we are more than cancer; we are more than any crisis, trial, sickness or ailment that might affect our human shell;

This is the good news; that we have an Advocate that will help us to get to know the other piece of ourselves that I would suspect we all innately know is there; waiting to be awakened.

This folks is the essence of the prevenient grace that covered us in our mother's womb.

To remind us that we are more than flesh and bones but we are also infused by God's Spirit.....

This my friends is the gift that Jesus leaves with us...

This is the gift that you and I need to unabashedly keep talking about..

This is the gift that we must share so that the gift keeps on giving...

To let the world know that there are not too many coincidences in life...

To name to the world that the loving abiding presence that they feel is very much real and very much alive....

To testify to the world that there is a spiritual reality out there that you and I are very much a part of...that you and I are very much created from!

Therefore when we hear that still quiet voice within us and when we witness it in full action; somehow, someday, we must help others; we must help ourselves too....not to not shy away from it; but to even dare draw closer to it...

Draw as close as Moses did to the burning bush that would not be consumed by the fire...

We must help ourselves and others to draw close to these experiences and awakenings for this is indeed the Advocate making itself known to us....

This is indeed the Advocate revealing to us, hello.... this is



a piece of you.... this is your story.... come let me introduce  
you to yourself; in a way you and I might have never seen  
ourselves before.....

Sincerely,

Kirstie Engel  
First United Methodist Church  
[www.firstumclincoln.org](http://www.firstumclincoln.org)  
402-466-1906

