

“Trusting the spirit”

January 22, 2012

Text: Psalm 62:5-12, Mark 1:14-20

Are you a worrier? I tend to be a worrier. I worry about my girls (and now my granddaughters) when they’re flying all over the world ... or across the country. I don’t like it when they make difficult flights or long drives without their husbands being there to support them.

I worry, too, about our church ... the health of our members ... the challenges of these tough economic times ... the growth of our congregation.

It might well be the case that I need this sermon today on trust more than any of us.

I.

In her book, *Wrestling Till Dawn*, Jean Blomquist, a frequent writer on the spiritual life, talks about how faith, at its most basic level, is ...

“living in trust—in trust that there is something beyond my own understanding, she says, something larger than me that I’m a part of.”

Going on, talking about faith, she adds: *faith gives me HOPE that each moment of life is sacred ... that every creature, every person is intimately connected.*

Some how, on some level, my guess is that Jesus’ disciples felt this way when—one day—along the Sea of Galilee, Jesus comes along and invites them to join him on a faith journey. We don’t know the details. The biblical accounts all sound so abrupt, so quick.

1. To **Peter** and his brother **Andrew**, who are fishermen and are about to cast their net into the lake, Jesus says: ***Follow me and I will make you fish for people.*** And, as the text says, immediately they leave their nets and follow him.
2. A short time later, the same thing happens with the brothers, **James** and **John**, the *sons of Zebedee* who, in a boat near by, were mending their nets. Again, ***Follow me and I will show you how to fish for people.***

In thinking about it, there must have been some powerful *impulse of trust* that came over them—Peter and Andrew ... and James and John. Perhaps they’d heard about Jesus. Perhaps they’d heard Jesus’ first words—his first words reported in Mark’s gospel:

***The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is near;
repent, and believe in the good news.***

II.

I've often wondered what Zebedee thought about all of this, the father of James and John. And what did the families of Peter and Andrew think?

- One minute your sons are fishermen; they may not be getting rich, but they're doing okay. At least you have some sense about their lives.
- And then, just like that—in a moment—they're off with Jesus on some mission having to do with *the kingdom of God*, whatever that is.

No doubt, the parents and family of these first disciples were deeply concerned about them. What would happen to them? What was this all about? Then again, it's possible they were all people of faith and were able to simply *trust* God in all of this.

The movie of some years back, *Billy Elliot*, tells the story of a young boy growing up in a working-class neighborhood in northern England. Quite unexpectedly, one day Billy discovers that he loves classical dance and, not only that, but he's a naturally talented dancer.

Then, over the long weeks and years—as Billy leaps head first into this *new world* of dance—his father has to learn to entrust his son to a world he can barely understand. But at the end of the movie we watch the father come to London to watch Billy Elliot leap and turn and dance with grace and beauty. And the father's face is a picture of sheer pride and joy.

The father is able to *trust* the process and the reality of his son's new life, even though he hardly understands it. Perhaps what he understands, in the end, is that his son seems happy and alive to the natural gift of dance that God has given him.

It might have been like that for the families of the disciples. *Trusting the spirit ...*

III.

Isn't it the case in all of our lives that there comes a point when—for better or worse—we simply have to *trust the Spirit*. We have to commit ourselves to the basic belief that the world God has created is fundamentally good. Life is good, and there are good prospects and possibilities out there for us if we follow our heart.

In the disciples' *immediate* response to Jesus' calling them, we're reminded how becoming a committed and faithful disciple of Christ takes both a moment and a lifetime. However, in the midst of it all is a powerful element of *trust*.

The Christian life is not necessarily an easy life. Why? Because life is hard.

All the time, we have stuff to deal with: rejections and failures ... fallen dreams and disappointments ... sadness and grief ... worries about this/ worries about that. One day, we're up; the next, we're down. That's life!

Still, there is the lingering sense that if we stick with it, if we don't give up, if we keep after it ... that it's worth it; because it's about people and it's about love.

And once we open our lives to the *spirit of Christ*, once the *spirit of Christ* lives in us and we grasp the wonder and the power of its warmth, trust comes. And when we learn to *trust the love* and *trust the grace* and *trust the spirit*, a whole new world and a whole new life open up to us.

IV.

Pastor Neal Sadler recalls hearing evangelist **Billy Graham** speak at a banquet in the twilight years of his ministry. Obviously, Rev. Graham had had lots of time to think about his ministry ... and as he thought back—keeping Jesus before him as a model for ministry—he wondered if he would have been more effective—rather than preaching to the masses like he did at his revivals—to simply choose twelve disciples, as Jesus did, and pour his heart into them.

The point in this is that the most critical thing we can do in ministry is to *pour our lives into people*. Making disciples ... pouring our lives into one another, into the new people that come to our church, and into people out in the community and beyond.

That's what the Church is about. That's our task. That's our mission.

Calling people to the *good news*. Calling people to LIFE, to the *life-spark* God has planted in them—calling people to be alive to the promises of God.

- We do this by *trusting the spirit* and by giving ourselves to the process. TRUST is a critical element here.
- Friends, the best we can do in life is *work hard, strive for excellence* in all that we do and, hoping for the best, *turn it over to God*.
- Hard work and striving for excellence should never be downplayed. Still, there comes a point when we've got to let go and let God. If we don't, we'll go mad.

I struggle with this all the time. I want to trust God and trust in the process but I also want to do well. I want our church to be successful ... and then I have to remind myself that—more than being successful—what the Church is about is being faithful ... and faith demands trust. In fact, faith devoid of trust is not much faith at all.

V.

There's a story of a man—somewhat older now—who, early on showed all kinds of potential and possibilities. Sadly, however, along the way, he became addicted to cocaine and his life tumbled into a dark hole. He lost his family. He lost his place in graduate school and he lost many big pieces of himself.

Still, somehow—miracle of miracles—he washed up on the shores of a good church where, over time, the church was able to put their arms around him and love him down a healing path. As the healing began to build up, eventually, against all odds, he was even able to reunite with his wife and children.

And then one day at his pastor's house, with his wife at his side, he began to talk about his life. CHECK IT OUT!

I want so much to believe that my best days are still ahead of me, he said, and that I can still make a difference for God. Going on, with his head in his hands, he said: sometimes I just can't help think that I've blown all of my chances.

About then his wife, God bless her, reached over, took his hand and she said—(GET THIS):

Baby, you've got to take your sticky fingers off that steering wheel. If God could yank Jesus out of a grave, there's no reason why he can't make something beautiful out of your busted parts.

VI.

There comes a point in any of our lives when we have to *let go and let God*. By ourselves, we can't make everything right in our lives. We can't straighten out all the crooked stuff. There are some things we simply can't fix.

What we CAN do is open our spirit to God, offer up our very best ... and, **trusting the spirit**, turn it over to God and hope for the best.

Trusting the spirit is so important. *Trusting the spirit ... trusting the love ... trusting the relationship.*

As an aside in all of this, *trusting the relationship* is the most faith-centered way of dealing with our relationships, particularly in raising our children. We trust in the relationship and then, when our children fall short (in whatever way) we express our disappointment. Assuming that the *love* is there (this is a major assumption), our children don't want to disappoint us.

Trusting the spirit. *Trusting the spirit* takes faith ... and it takes courage.

Some years ago, **Richard Cardinal Cushing** wrote about the church's need for courage:

*If all the sleeping folks would wake up ...
And all the lukewarm folks would fire up ...*

*And all the disgruntled folks would sweeten up ...
And all the discouraged folks would cheer up ...*

*And all the depressed folks would look up ...
And all the estranged folks would make up ...*

*And all the gossiping folks would shut up ...
And all the dry bones would shake up ...*

*And all the church members would pray up
Remembering that the Savior of the world has been lifted up ...*

We could have the greatest renewal the world has ever known.

Trusting the spirit, friends ... working together ... doing everything in LOVE ... There's no mountain we cannot climb, no vision of ministry we cannot realize ...

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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