

When the Spirit Comes

May 5, 2012

1 John 4:1-20 John 21:1-14 Acts 1:7-8

Responsive reading from I John 4:1-21

Leader: Dear friends, test the spirits to see whether they are from God,

People: **many false prophets have gone out into the world.**

Leader: This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God:

People: **Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,**

Leader: but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God.

People: **Such a spirit is the spirit of the antichrist, which is already in the world.**

Leader: You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world.

People: **This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood.**

Leader: Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.

People: **Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.**

Leader: Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

People: **This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.**

Leader: This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

People: **We love because he first loved us.**

Leader: If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar.

People: **For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.**

Leader: And he has given us this command:

People: **Whoever loves God must also love his brother.**

John 21:1-14 ¹ Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Tiberias. It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (called Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

⁶ He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment

around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

¹¹ Simon Peter climbed aboard and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Acts 1:7-8 After his resurrection, Jesus showed himself to the disciples and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?"

⁷ He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

Will you pray with me... May the words of my mouth...

Yes, we may be anxious to move on, but we're still in that holding pattern, as the first disciples were, waiting for the Spirit, between Easter and Pentecost. Pentecost is just three weeks away... We humans are an impatient people; we don't much like waiting.

When the Spirit comes you will receive power, to be my witnesses, in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

The resource of power is the Holy Spirit. The purpose of the empowerment is to be His witnesses. And then there is the direction; last week we began to talk about the direction - (Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.) The direction moves outward, away from self, away from where I am, toward where God wants me to go; toward what Jesus wants me to become as his witness.

Follow the leader – did any of you play that game when you were young? To follow we had to get up and move, didn't we? Not for Simon says – that was one we could play without going anywhere, but

for follow the leader we had to follow. When Jesus called the disciples he didn't say, 'sit here and call yourselves my followers.' He said "follow me." And we may remember after the time when many deserted the cause as too difficult he asked the 12 - 'are you also going to leave?' Remember? And Peter said 'to whom else would we go - you have the word of life - we have given up everything to follow you.' Follow the leader.

But following has to start where we are. We can't start following from somewhere else, unless we delay following until some time else. When Jesus spoke this promise to them he told them to stay in Jerusalem, until the Holy Spirit came. Jerusalem was not home to the disciples, they were northerners from Galilee, but like other devout Jews they came to Jerusalem multiple times a year for the high religious festivals, or holy days. That is where they were - in Jerusalem - in the religious center of their faith.

So we observed, last week, that our witness starts here, in our Jerusalem, here in our community of faith, among fellow believers who seek to follow Jesus; among friends who try to live by faith even while our minds and culture tell us to live by sight. Our witness starts here, in Jerusalem. Not Jerusalem the city in Israel, but here, in this place where we gather as the early disciples gathered at the Temple in Jerusalem, hoping and expecting to experience the presence of God.

So, if we start 'where we are,' in the center of our faith community, in our Jerusalem. What does it mean, then, to move from witnessing in Jerusalem to witnessing in Judea? I'm glad you asked.

Just as we asked what Jerusalem meant to the disciples, we have to ask what did Judea mean to them? Judea was their country, but it was more than a national identity. It was also a familial connection.

The Bible tells us that there were twelve tribes of Israel, - the twelve sons of Jacob who went to Egypt in the famine, whose offspring some 300 years later became enslaved by a Pharaoh who did not know about Joseph. These 12 tribes were led out of Egypt by Moses, and entered the Promised land under Joshua. Eventually they clamored for a king, like the other nations around them, but after the reigns of Kings Saul, David and Solomon, there was a split between the northern ten tribes, thereafter known as Israel, and the southern two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, thereafter known by the name of the larger tribe, Judah.

210 years later the northern ten tribes were conquered by Assyria and ultimately dispersed in exile. Judah continued as a nation for another 115 years until they were conquered, this time by the Babylonians and were ultimately also taken into exile. Unlike the Assyrians who dispersed the conquered peoples, the Babylonians kept the exiles from Judah in communities of fellow exiles, encouraging them to maintain their culture and traditions. They were known as Judahites – which eventually shortened to ‘Jews.’

These exiles in Babylon were the heroes in the Daniel, Shadrach, Michak and Abednego stories, which will be the focus of our VBS this year, as well as the prophets Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Isaiah.

Stay with me... 49 years later Babylonia was overthrown by Persia, and Cyrus, king of Persia, decreed that the Judahites, the Jews, could return to the lands formerly occupied by all twelve tribes. So, at the time of Jesus, Judea was not just the tribal land of Judah, but was the entire geography of the original 12 tribes of Israel and the identities Judea and Israel became essentially synonymous.

So, while Jerusalem represented the religious identity of the disciples, Judea represented the familial and national identity.

When the Spirit comes you will receive power, to be my witnesses, in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

The direction is ____ (out).

And is the group to which we witness in this next step of witness is larger or smaller? (larger)

Is this next step with familiar folks or strangers? (familiar)

Our witness starts here, in the church, the community of faith, then moves into our arena of associations – family, friends, associates, neighbors, folks with whom we share some common connections and interests.

And our witness? What is our witness to each other here in Jerusalem and out there in Judea? Our witness is not that we belong here in Jerusalem because we all like the same songs and worship style, or because we’ve been raised in a Methodist background, or because we like the people here, or even because we’re God’s special favorites. I pray Our witness is that we love Jesus, who first loved us and gave himself for us. Our witness is that we belong to each other because we have the same Lord and Savior who came to earth to redeem sinners.

John Wesley encouraged the early Methodists to be open hearted with something like these words; 'whatever does not strike at the heart of the Christian faith, I say think and let think. If your heart is right with the Lord, and my heart is right with the Lord, then take my hand, for I am your brother.'

When we go out from here, our witness in Judea is not about the sin of others, but about the grace of God. Our witness is to the fact that Jesus gave his life as a ransom for many, for all who will accept the gift. We are empowered to be his witnesses... witnesses to *his* grace. We may have a personal opinion, a personal sense of right and wrong, a personal sense of justice and propriety; and we can offer those opinions, as opinions. But our witness as Christians, the only witness which will be empowered by the Holy Spirit, is our witness to the love and grace of Jesus in whom we have found redemption and to whom we testify as the Lord of life.

That does not mean calling sin 'not sin,' or politely allowing people to die in their ignorance. Jesus instructed his disciples that when the Holy Spirit came they would be empowered to be his witnesses, in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth.

One way we witness to our family and friends is to share table fellowship – to include each other in sharing the fundamental basics of life. That is one reason coming to the Table of our Lord is considered a sacrament – a sacred experience of the divine presence in the very midst of the most common events of life. It is also why Charley, and Curtiss before him, extend the invitation to us on a regular basis to join the youth at the Mall food court; to share table fellowship. It is a witness to each other in Jerusalem, but also to each other in Judea – among folks from our own community – that Jesus is alive and still changing lives, including our own.

When the Spirit comes... you will receive power, to be my witnesses, in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

Next week is Mother's Day – I don't think we'll be moving out to Samaria next week; there's still plenty of witnessing still to do in Judea. So, this week, I'd like you to think about those who have been a witness to Jesus in your Judea – who in your family, among your friends, associates and neighbors, have witnessed to you, and heard your witness?

Particularly consider your mother's witness as we come to Mother's Day next week. If, by chance, your mother is still alive and not a believer, pray that God will graciously empower your witness in Judea – in and to your own household. If your mother has already passed on, take some time to consider her witness, or more accurately, the witness of Christ's resurrected living presence, experienced through her.

If there are people in our circles of influence, friends, family, associates, - our Judea – who do not have a relationship with Jesus pray that each of us may witness to Christ's love and grace as manifest in our deeds, even more than in our words.

But know that to follow Jesus means we have to move from witnessing where we are – here in the Jerusalem of our community of faith – to witnessing in our Judea – our circle of influence and association – people we know and care about. That is what God's grace is all about, a widening circle of compassion and saving grace.