

“The Witness of the Spirit”

Psalm 68:1-10, Acts 1:6-14

June 1st, 2014

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According to the church calendar, today is Ascension Sunday. After resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples and now he is returning back to His Heavenly Father. Our New Testament reading describes the Ascension like a Hollywood movie scene. While disciples were watching, Jesus was taken up and disappeared in a cloud. Literally, Jesus rose into the sky like a helium balloon. What a glorious transition from the earth to Heaven! But today, I am neither fascinated by how the Ascension happened nor why Jesus chose this way. I am more interested in its meaning. For example, I believe God is not interested in your transportation to church, but your presence is more important to God. In the same reason, what really did Jesus want his disciples and us to learn from his departure?

Let's change our focus from the glory of Jesus to his disciples and his little faith community. When Jesus told his disciples that he was going to His Heavenly Father, imagine his followers' reactions to say a goodbye to their master, their Savior. His disciples were still struggling in their faith and concerned about their little and fragile faith community. They believe that Jesus Christ would rise into heaven to sit on the right hand of God, but emotionally, they were anxious, bewildered staring into the empty sky. Some were worrying about their uncertain future without their master. At the moment of Jesus' departure, some disciples asked their master whether it is the time when he will restore the Kingdom to Israel. They still believed that Jesus is their political leader to save their Kingdom. We see their fear and anxiety in this transitional chaos. For his anxious disciples, Jesus assured that they would not be alone. He promised that the Holy Spirit would come and give them **power**. Here, we see an important feeling among Jesus' disciples and faith community. Jesus' disciples were afraid of being left out in despair and they felt powerless. The challenge is how to keep their faith feeling the presence of the Lord.

How about our life? Here is an old hymn that describes our life.

We sail along toward the harbor light,
Over the great life sea;
The breakers roar and the waves dash high,
Who will our pilot be?

We sail along in the morning bright,
Happy and glad are we;
But still we ask, as the rocks draw near,
Who will our pilot be?

We sail along, there are shoals, they say,
Dangers from which to flee;
We face the storm with a heavy heart,
Who will our pilot be?

(Lizzie DeArmond, 1847-1936)

Our life is fragile. We don't know what is coming up tomorrow. In a sense, life is uncertain and unpredictable. We encounter many unexpected things. Some are good, but not always. To experience unexpected and surprising things, I am happy to invite you to visit my home. Last night, my son Jacob again messed up his room and the living room with all his toys. I almost tripped over his toys and in the living room I hit some of his toys and heard over and over "twinkle twinkle little star" and "the ABC song". Like a mess in my home, life is full of challenges. We carefully must navigate our boat in the ocean of life. We face challenges like heavy storms and high waves and we feel overwhelmed and exhausted because of fear and anxiety. We need to ask ourselves, "Who will our pilot be?" Unfortunately, we live in an era and in a world where everything is up to us. We have a delusive notion that we are strong, powerful and almighty. We want to believe that we are masters of our life. Honestly, we want to ask ourselves whether we need to ask our God as our pilot.

Our New Testament reading is an invitation to Jesus' Spirit and a new life. Jesus says to his disciples, "Receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." What does this mean for us? When we open ourselves to Jesus, our God, the Holy Spirit will come into our hearts and will be our guide. Then, we will have power to be strong. This power is not a political power but is the way to peace calming our inner turmoil. It can be strength to move forward in the ocean of life providing courage and boldness to row our boat without fear and anxiety. When the Spirit dwells in us, we have power beyond ourselves. Jesus invites us to experience this power and to be witnesses of the Spirit to the world.

Many of you know that our church is facing significant budgetary challenges. The annual budget deficit is a big concern for future church ministries. Let's be honest. We are afraid and anxious. We feel challenged about our situation. But I want to encourage you and lift you up this morning. Let's be joyful instead of

worrying because Jesus promises us the great gift of power to face our challenges. At our spiritual retreat this year, a sailing ship represented our journey through rugged waters. The ship moves us forward fueled by the Spirit. As long as we believe in Jesus and accept the Holy Spirit, this Spirit will safely guide and lead us to our destination. Let's remember that the Spirit has power and will renew our church. We are invited to be witnesses of the Spirit in all our challenges. Our Old Testament reading describes about what God does for his people.

Whatever challenges we face in our world, we can be assured that God always travels with us. The Ascension Day is a great reminder for us that God will be traveling with us, fueling us through the Holy Spirit wherever we go and whatever challenges may threaten us in the ocean of life. Therefore, let us not be afraid anymore but joyful and hopeful as we sail along toward the harbor light. Amen.