

“Where Have You Seen God Lately?”

Psalm 127, Hebrews 9:24-28

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I followed the church lectionary for my sermon. Our Scripture readings come from Psalm 127 and Hebrew 9:24-28. At first, it seems that there is no connection between two different Scripture readings. What does the Bible speak to and challenge us this morning? I found something in common from two Scripture readings. Let me share each one verse with you and think about what it means. Psalm 127 says, “Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain” (v. 1). And in the New Testament reading, Hebrews reminds us that our hopes are founded upon Christ, and not upon any sanctuary built with human hands. If God doesn’t build the house, it is doomed to come crashing down around us. Each reading talks about the importance of ‘building’ something with the guidance of God. The key point of our readings is about our spiritual foundation, whether **our life and our church is Spirit oriented**. What about your life?

I am not a carpenter nor a general contractor. So I don’t know much about the ‘building’ process, but I know one thing for sure. When general contractors use materials, for example, logs, wires, windows, and any other parts, the purpose of putting them all together is to build a house. Their time, work and sweat are geared to build a stable and comfortable house based on a solid foundation. It is the same for our church and individual life. When God created us in His image, God must have invested in us a special purpose. Our life is to find out God’s special purpose and to complete its basic mission while we are on the road of our journey. In the same way, we know that church is not a building, but the community of people of faith. If we lose a close sense of God’s presence and God’s purpose, our church is not a living church, but one that is failing. We want a growing, thriving church (I am not talking about a big church, but a healthy church.) with a sense of the Holy Spirit and the power of God through our active ministries.

Next Sunday, November 18, our church conference is scheduled at Wesley Hall after service. Our Circuit leader, Rev. Elizabeth Brick, will come and preside over the conference. In the Methodist Church, church conference is an annual evaluation gathering for this year’s ministries and a preparation for another year to move forward with new leadership. A couple of weeks ago, at our Staff Parish Relations Committee meeting, I was asked to share my ministry

goals for 2013. I presented my three goals: First, continue to strengthen our young people's ministry. Second is to support our stewardship campaign, and be more active as a mission oriented church. Obviously, I hope that we are building 'a good spirit filled' church.

By the way, what does it mean to be 'a good spirited church'? Certainly, spiritual sensitivity is the essence of the church. I want to go back to the beginning of our Methodist tradition in John Wesley's time. The Methodist Church started as a movement of renewing our faith and relationship in God. The movement required aspiration for a new life. John Wesley believed that Bible study or small group class meetings were the essence of the Methodist church. People were asked to attend their regional class meetings for personal spiritual growth. They learned about faith, the Bible and checked in with their souls. John Wesley asked them, "How is your soul? Are you still experiencing the personal love of God in your daily lives?" They were very aware of the importance of a spirit guided life. Let me add one more question. "Where have you seen God lately?" Although we believe in God, we may not feel His close and personal presence. Where have you experienced His personal love?

I saw a moving video clip some years ago. It was a story about a relationship between Dick Hoyt and his son, Rick Hoyt. Because of extensive damage at birth, Rick couldn't walk or talk and his father couldn't even play catch with his son. But together, they were an inspiration to people around the world. Dick and Judy, his wife, wanted a normal life for their son. Together they decided to put Rick in public school. Rick learned to write his thoughts using a special computer. When Rick was fifteen years old, he communicated to his dad that he wanted to participate in a five-mile benefit run. Dick was not a runner, but agreed to push Rick in his wheelchair. For the first time in his life, Rick didn't feel handicapped. So together, they ran. Together they competed in marathons. Together they compete in triathlons. Together they trekked 3,770 miles across America. Rick couldn't compete without his dad, and Dick wouldn't compete without his son. Dick was Rick's body and Rick was the heart. Together they ran. This is a true story.

In a sense, our journey of life is so fragile. It must be handled with care and the love of God. We should be humble that we are not good at navigating our travel in this dark and dangerous ocean. Together we have power. God doesn't leave us alone. We are on a lonely road by ourselves. We are easily trapped by the anxiety and fear of an unknown future and the many challenges around us. We know our vulnerability. God sent Jesus, if you accept him as your Savior, he will be your guide and he will transform you to the body of God's glory. In your journey, consider inviting Jesus Christ to be your mate.

While I was studying “John Wesley’s rules for small groups” which were written in 1816, I discovered some meaningful questions. Believers gathered together, sharing honestly, becoming accountable to one another, asking questions, praying for one another with a deep knowledge of their mutual needs and struggles. Wesley’s rules ask;

- Can I be trusted?
- Do I confidentially pass on to others what has been said to me?
- Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I really am?
- Am I a hypocrite?
- Do I give the Bible time to speak to me everyday?
Does it live in me today?
- Do I grumble or complain constantly?
- Do I insist upon doing something of which my conscience is uneasy?
- **Is Christ real to me?**

Importantly, the last question, “Is Christ real to me?” still makes me think about the answer. How about you? “Is Christ real to you?” As an Anglican priest, John Wesley experienced the love of God and he started a new movement. He described his personal moment with a feeling of God’s grace, “I felt my heart strangely warmed and believed that God works in the heart through faith in Christ.” Is Christ real to all of us and in our church? John Wesley believed his movement would bring passion to Methodism. I hope we continue to do good works and witness Christ with boldness and passion as people of God. Amen.