

Vision by the Spirit

With the Holy Spirit: Part 2 “Vision by the Spirit”

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – January 28, 2024

Baptism of the Lord

Readings: Genesis 1:1-5; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11

Reflection: Psalm 146

Greeting: God’s kingdom is about righteousness and peace, and the joy we find together in the Holy Spirit. Serving Christ in this way pleases both God and people. So, let’s strive for peace and building each other up!

Prayer: God of all the nations, you showed your tremendous love by sending your Son into the world that all might have life through him. Pour out your Holy Spirit upon your church this day, that we may follow his command to preach the good news for all to hear it. Grant us strength to speak the truth of your steadfast love and faithfulness. Help us to lift up the least and the last and to give comfort to the afflicted. Let us bear witness to your mercy and grace so that all may know of your wonderful gift. May we remember the baptism by your Holy Spirit so that we may see, may learn, and may grow with you, and may all find the hope that you have given to the world through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 146

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God all my life long. Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish. Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the Lord!

(Psalm 146 NRSV)*

We read the words of Psalm 146 and hear of praising God. That we should praise God because we know he is the helper of those who seek justice. That he lifts up the lowly and the oppressed. That he feeds the hungry, sets the prisoner free, and opens the eyes of the blind. That everyone in need can turn to the Lord for comfort. How do you share that comfort with others? What does Christ’s love for you inspire you to do for others? Who can you lift up in

prayer this week? What can you do to reach out to help them? What are your prayers for the community? How can you share the peace of Christ with someone else this week? How do we accept guidance by the Holy Spirit?

Prayer: Almighty God, you are there before we even speak. You know the deepest thoughts of our minds and the truest desires of our hearts. We seek your wisdom and your grace on this day. We come before you, speaking the worries that trouble us and we speak of the joys that we are thankful for. But we also turn to you with the unspoken concerns and celebrations we hold within. But we know that your mercy and love are always there for your children. Let your Holy Spirit be poured out on your people that we may know you in our dancing and our weeping. May we be reminded of your steadfast love in our laughter and our tears. And may we in turn show our love for you in our love for each other, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the Common English Bible. Our first reading is from Isaiah chapter 57, verse 14 through verse 19.

It will be said: "Survey, survey; build a road! Remove barriers from my people's road!" The one who is high and lifted up, who lives forever, whose name is holy, says: I live on high, in holiness, and also with the crushed and the lowly, reviving the spirit of the lowly, reviving the heart of those who have been crushed. I won't always accuse, nor will I be enraged forever. It is my own doing that their spirit is exhausted—I gave them breath! I was enraged about their illegal profits; I struck them; in rage I withdrew from them. Yet they went on wandering wherever they wanted. I have seen their ways, but I will heal them. I will guide them, and reward them with comfort. And for those who mourn, I will create reason for praise: utter prosperity to those far and near, and I will heal them, says the Lord. (Isaiah 57:14-19 CEB+)

Our next reading is from Acts chapter 9, verses 1 through 20.

Meanwhile, Saul was still spewing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest, seeking letters to the synagogues in Damascus. If he found persons who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, these letters would authorize him to take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. During the journey, as he approached Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven encircled him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice asking him, "Saul, Saul, why are you harassing me?" Saul asked, "Who are you, Lord?" "I am Jesus, whom you are harassing," came the reply. "Now get up and enter the city. You will be told what you must do." Those traveling with him stood there speechless; they heard the voice but saw no one. After they picked Saul up from the ground, he opened his eyes but he couldn't see. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind and neither ate nor drank anything. In Damascus there was a certain disciple named Ananias. The Lord spoke to him in a vision, "Ananias!" He answered, "Yes, Lord." The Lord instructed him, "Go to Judas' house on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul. He is praying. In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias enter and put his hands

on him to restore his sight.” Ananias countered, “Lord, I have heard many reports about this man. People say he has done horrible things to your holy people in Jerusalem. He’s here with authority from the chief priests to arrest everyone who calls on your name.” The Lord replied, “Go! This man is the agent I have chosen to carry my name before Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” Ananias went to the house. He placed his hands on Saul and said, “Brother Saul, the Lord sent me—Jesus, who appeared to you on the way as you were coming here. He sent me so that you could see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.” Instantly, flakes fell from Saul’s eyes and he could see again. He got up and was baptized. After eating, he regained his strength. He stayed with the disciples in Damascus for several days. Right away, he began to preach about Jesus in the synagogues. “He is God’s Son,” he declared. (Acts 9:1-20 CEB+)

Our final reading is from Luke, chapter 10, verses 20 through 22.

Nevertheless, don’t rejoice because the spirits submit to you. Rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven.” At that very moment, Jesus overflowed with joy from the Holy Spirit and said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you’ve hidden these things from the wise and intelligent and shown them to babies. Indeed, Father, this brings you happiness. My Father has handed all things over to me. No one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wants to reveal him.” (Luke 10:20-22 CEB+)

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We continue to look at the Holy Spirit this week. Our readings today include the familiar account of the conversion of Saul, who would go on to be known as Paul. This isn’t a name change, as is often thought, but that Saul is his Hebrew name and Paul his Greek. I ask for forgiveness if I happen to bounce between the two because I’m so used to saying Paul instead of Saul, but our reading only uses Saul today. I wanted to focus on this conversion because it is such an influential part of Acts. Saul/Paul goes on to write thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament and features heavily in the Acts of the Apostles. We can follow Paul’s travels through his letters as he journeys to share Christ. And he does so because he was moved by the Spirit. I wanted to be able to highlight the role of the Holy Spirit in his conversion to show just how much of a change it can make when his eyes are opened, and he can truly see. I wanted to have readings today that would help us to think more deeply about this experience that he has. We begin with our reading from Acts where we see Saul persecuting the church. He is hunting down the people who are sharing the gospel message and he is relentless. And so, it is on the road to Damascus that a light falls upon Saul. A voice comes from the light and asks Saul why he is harassing him. Saul wants to know who it is that he is supposedly harassing. And the voice replies that it is Jesus. Jesus tells him to go into the city and it is there that he will learn what he must do. And the people with them have heard a voice but see nothing. Saul opens his eyes and sees nothing himself. Not even his traveling companions. So, they lead him into Damascus. For three days, he’s blind. He fasts in this time, eating and drinking nothing at all. And then comes Ananias. The Lord comes to him in a vision, telling him to seek out Saul of Tarsus. This does not go over well with Ananias. Because

Ananias has heard about Saul and knows what he's done. He knows that he has been headed that way to arrest people, so he doesn't see why he should be doing anything to help him. But the reply he gets is that he should still go. That this is the agent that has been chosen to go to the Gentiles, that he will carry the name of the Lord to the Gentiles, kings, and Israelites. That he will suffer for the name of Jesus. But as we know, Saul ends up doing this gladly. Why does he do it? Ananias goes and places his hands on Saul. He says that Jesus sent him and that he has come to heal him so that he may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Instantly, flakes fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see. He gets up and he is baptized. Saul has received the Holy Spirit. When he regains his strength, he begins to preach about Jesus saying that he is God's son. His heart and his life are changed, and he receives the Holy Spirit so that he can begin to proclaim the good news because now he can see.

The readings that I chose to go with this help to deepen our understanding of what happens with Saul. Our gospel reading from Luke helps us to think about the Holy Spirit. Jesus uses an almost sarcastic tone that can throw us off. Jesus says he is thankful that things have been hidden from the wise and intelligent and shown to babies instead. I think that statement can throw us off because we may take it too literally. I don't think it is in any way saying that intelligent people can't understand Jesus. I think it is talking about people who consider themselves to be wise and intelligent, because I've known plenty of people like that in my time. Jesus is rejoicing that these people just beginning their journey have had Jesus revealed to them. These things can be shown to give people a new idea, to open their eyes to something new. That Jesus overflowing with joy from the Holy Spirit because those who have seen the truth have accepted it and believed it. We can hear another version of this in Isaiah. We hear this in the way that God heals the people. That God is there for the crushed and the lowly, reviving the spirit of the lowly, reviving the heart of those who've been crushed. That God's anger will not remain with the people but that they will instead find mercy. Because the people know they haven't done what was right. They brought about God's rage through illegal profits, through abusing and taking advantage of others. But what we get is a message of hope. That though God has seen all of this, that he will heal them. Much as Saul had done many terrible things before he was healed. That God will guide them and reward them with comfort. That God will create reason for praise for those who have been mourning. And that God will heal them.

I thought about all of this from Isaiah when reading about the conversion of Saul. Because it was the idea of the way that God heals those who are broken. That brokenness can take many forms, but God can heal them all. Saul is in some ways blind to the harm he is doing because he is blind to the love that is there for him. Because he is blind to Christ. Saul is persecuting people for orthodoxy, punishing people that he thinks go against the right teachings of the temple. He is persecuting people because they have a different idea than he has. People are believing in a way that he doesn't like. His eyes are closed because he refuses to see the goodness in others. His eyes are closed because he refuses to think that God might

have a different plan than Saul. And this is an arrogance that we still see in people today. It's not uncommon for people to think that God must think exactly like they do and anyone who experiences God's love differently must be lying and in need of punishment. It's all too common to see this today, even in churches. It's not uncommon to find people who think just like Saul, declaring that anyone who thinks differently than they do is a threat to the faith. And in some ways, we are often all blind to the ways that we could change because we're so busy seeing the way that we disagree with others. Saul was blind to the way that his heart and life could be changed. But Jesus knew his potential. That if he set his mind on God's love and forgiveness, if he set his mind on the redemption that Christ brought, just how much more he could do. Just how much an instrument of God's love he could be if he could just open his eyes. And the gift of the Holy Spirit helps him to gain his vision. Not just from being struck blind but being blind to the good he could be in the world. Saul has been thinking so much about defending the faith that I think he had lost track of what it meant to have faith. I think he lost track of what it meant to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself because he was so busy with right thinking that he forgot about right living. And the Holy Spirit restores him and brings him back. When he is filled with the Holy Spirit, he begins to preach the good news. The gospel is always on his lips after this.

Now, you might wonder, was he just that way because he had been punished and struck blind and then got his sight restored? But I don't see this as punishment. I think it was a chance for Saul to reflect because he couldn't stop and think. He couldn't stop what he was doing, and when he finally does, he experiences God's love and God's mercy and God's grace. Because someone who should have hated him comes to lay hands on him to heal him because of Christ. Someone who should have rejoiced in his suffering comes to lay hands on him to grant him the Holy Spirit so that he can see. And I think that chance that Saul has to experience love through Christ is what fully changes his heart and his life. Because I think that that love, that forgiveness changes him. That Saul can easily reflect on what he has done and how this person that days ago he would have been ready to haul back to Jerusalem under threat and under charges of violating the law has come to lay hands on him and give him this gift. I think sometimes we miss that Jesus doesn't directly give him his sight back. It is a follower of Christ laying hands and baptizing Saul. Saul receives the Holy Spirit and regains his sight so that he has a new way of seeing the world. And this perspective allows him to go out and change the world. And we see how fervently he goes out to share this message with the Gentiles. To share this message with the world. And we see that amazing grace that Saul has received. Because Saul can say that before the Holy Spirit was shown to him, that he once was blind, but now can see. May we all let the Holy Spirit refresh and renew us in the same way so that we all may see. That we all may grow. So that in the name of Christ, we may all love. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – With the Holy Spirit

Our current series is all about the Holy Spirit. Each week we explore another aspect of the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives. How do we walk in our journey with Christ and with the Holy Spirit?

January 14th – Baptized in the Spirit – Genesis 1:1-5; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11

January 28th – Vision by the Spirit – Isaiah 57:14-19; Acts 9:1-20; Luke 10:20-22

February 4th – Teaching from the Spirit – Micah 4:1-4; Hebrews 10:11-18; John 14:18-31

February 11th – Share of the Spirit – 2 Kings 2:1-12; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9

(Pastor Cameron is on vacation January 21st, so there is no print out or video for that Sunday)

Prayer List

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|------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Rev Angie Lee | Bishop Frank Beard | Our Conference | Eric Veach |
| Ed & Verna Titus | Henry Catey | Jake Kiser | Cindy Cisney |
| Tricia Adkins | Don Stewart | Ronnie Winstead | Lauren Stewart |
| Tom Finley | Laura Carlen | Rosie Chancellor | Chuck Hogan |
| Richard Durham | Kathy Hanks | Emily Blade | Tim Schnauz |
| Donna Carlen | Ernie Peters | Jess Shoot | Stanley Kiser |
| Corine Howard | Don Gilmore | Shirley Jester | Marsha Overton |
| Linda Carlen | Michael Nichols | Paul Cox | Taylor Waldorf |
| Harriet Tucker | Marlene Kincaid | Cara Dillier | Peggy Farley |
| Mandy Schumacher | Ann McMorris | Marci Cutts Smith | Jaydelyn Brassard |
| Pat Hayden Titus | Calvin St. Michael | Devona Dittamore | Nancy McElravy |
| Gary & Mary Winterrowd | Leo Smith | Sue & Bob Smyser | Larry Thompson |
| Evelyn Sue Icenogle | Greg Williams | | |

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