

“Life with the Holy Spirit”

Acts 8: 4-8, 14-40

We pick up our continuing conversation with the Book of Acts and we come across a very unusual chapter. In today’s reading, we hear about the disciples scattering. We hear about the Holy Spirit moving in crazy ways. We hear about one of the disciples, Phillip being plopped down on a road in the wilderness where he meets and begins a conversation with an outsider about Jesus only to soon find himself being picked up again and plopped down in another city without ever having the chance to say good-bye. Our text is a crazy unexpected story that reminds us once again to expect the unexpected especially when the Holy Spirit is involved, something we don’t like to do as modern day disciples. The fact of the matter is that we as modern day disciples like knowing what to expect. We like knowing what to expect when we come to church. We like knowing all the details when we talk about our calling as followers of Jesus Christ. We like knowing what is going to happen next during our worship services. That’s why we have weekly bulletins that tell us step by step how to worship when we gather on Sunday mornings.

As modern day disciples, what we don’t like especially when it comes to our churches, when it comes to our faith, and especially when it comes to our calling as

followers of Jesus Christ is expecting the unexpected. The very idea sends us into a panic. It makes us uncomfortable. It makes us feel like we are not in control. The whole idea of expecting the unexpected just doesn't fit in with our neatly planned out church calendars.

That's why as modern day disciples, we would rather just ignore the Holy Spirit all together. Or we at least pretend the Holy Spirit is just some crazy relative that only shows up once year and then after it leaves, we know we will have at least a year to straighten out the chaos it created and maybe find some peace and quiet until it shows up again next year. In fact, if we are completely honest with ourselves, as modern day disciples, it is not just that we don't like the Holy Spirit. We don't even like mentioning the Holy Spirit in our churches. We are so afraid that if we talk about the Holy Spirit too much, then we will be inviting it to stick around which can only mean trouble. We think that by just asking for the Spirit to come into our churches and into our lives, there will be chaos. And if truth be known, these are places that we are already feeling insecure and worried about because things are changing so much around us and we certainly don't want to invite more chaos.

No, we like things the way they are in our churches and in our lives. We have our routines. We know what we are doing. We have our carefully designed plans. We know who is doing what and we certainly don't appreciate the Holy

Spirit coming in and making any unexpected changes. That crazy Holy Spirit is just too unpredictable. It won't play by our rules. It won't stay still. So we have decided that as the church and as modern day disciples, the best way to deal with the Holy Spirit is to ignore it and hope it will just go away on its own.

Except that it hasn't after two thousand some years. The Holy Spirit keeps showing up in our churches. The Holy Spirit keeps showing up in our worship. The Holy Spirit keeps challenging us to step outside of our comfort zones and meet the stranger, to welcome our neighbors, and to share God's love and grace with all people, those that look and think like us and those who don't.

That pesky Holy Spirit just won't leave us alone and let us do our own thing, just like it wouldn't do some two thousand years ago with the early church and disciples, whether they liked it or not!

the interesting thing is that as we take a closer look at our text, we realize that the main actors in our story are not the group of apostles. No, the main actor in our story, the one that is doing all the moving and the sending is the Holy Spirit. The apostles are passive in our story, just waiting for the Spirit to move, to direct them where to go next. The apostles are scattered. They are led. They are sent. it is the Holy Spirit who is actively working, who is actively doing all the scattering, all the leading, and all the sending. As we look at our text, it is the Holy Spirit who is doing the moving and shaking, all for the sake of the Gospel message, all for the

sake of a message that world needed to hear, a message about God's love and welcome, a message that renews and strengthens God's people, the same as it is doing today.

We will discover that if we look at text, the Holy Spirit is not moving and shaking for its own benefit. No, It is actively working on behalf of the gospel message and for the apostles themselves. It realizes that if this group of newly formed followers of Christ stays in the comfort zone of Jerusalem, if they continue to ignore the pushings of the Spirit, if they keep to their safe routines, then surely all that would awaited them is death. Because ,while all this moving and shaking and pushing of the disciples is going on by the Spirit, at the same time, Saul, who would then later become Paul the great apostle, is already starting to persecute and kill the early church. Paul is working against the current of transformation and is trying to stop this new movement. He is trying to keep things from changing. He is trying to keep things the way he understands them and sees them to be as the correct way of doing things. If the apostles had simply ignored the Spirit's moving and shaking, and had just waited for the Spirit to go away so that they could go back to their routines, then surely all that would have awaited them would have been darkness, which is exactly the same fate that now awaits us as the church today.

Now please don't hear me say that our church or the wider church is dying. I'm not saying that. The Body of Christ won't die off that easily but as I started to think about our text this week and what it is calling us to do as modern day disciples, I came to the realization that there is a state worse than death that we find ourselves in today as the modern church. It is the state of apathy. We have gotten so used to the gospel message that it no longer holds any power or good news for us. It seems like We have lost our passion for our calling to bring healing and wholeness to God's creation. It seems that as church and as modern day disciples, we have gotten so used to the creative power of God that now when we see something sacred, something that reminds us of God's glory, we simply yawn and say "God, we've seen that before. What else do you have for us?"

The funny thing about it all is that this state of apathy is no one else's fault by our own. by ignoring the Holy Spirit and hoping it won't show up in our churches, we have lost our sense of wonder. We simply don't expect God to move among us. We simply don't expect God to open our eyes to the Kingdom of God in our midst. All because we haven't left room in our churches and in our lives for the Holy Spirit.

We've turned the life-transforming mystery of God into something so mundane that we can't even be bothered to strike up a sense of awe when we

experience the glory of God in our lives and in our churches as people of faith.

And that is a state worse than death.

In our apathetic state, We've shut our eyes to the possibilities of the Kingdom of God simply because they interfere with our carefully planned church calendars. In our apathetic state, We've missed out on the renewing and refreshing gift of new life all because we like our routines. In our apathetic state, We've missed out on the Kingdom of God in our midst simply because we didn't have the time to be bothered.

As modern day disciples, we have forgotten that the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our churches. We have forgotten that Jesus promised us the gift of the Holy Spirit to empower us and to embolden us as the Body of Christ here on earth so that we could witness to God's redeeming love and grace in our world. Instead, we have simply said, "Well, that's nice" and then turned back to our carefully laid plans without even considering that just maybe God is calling us to something more, to something new, to something so life-transforming that it will wake us up and shake us up, and plop us down in the most unexpected of places.

The fact of the matter is that as the church, as modern day disciples, we have created this false sense of stability in our lives and in our churches. We have told ourselves that if we do a, b, and, c then life will slow down and then we will find some sort of peace. But the reality of it is that as people of God, we are always in

the state of becoming. That's the way life works. That's the way faith works. It is alive and it is dynamic. And we have fooled ourselves into believing otherwise.

The thing our text reminds us is that our very faith story is one that is filled with continuous movement, continuous growth, and continuous variation. That's life. That's faith.

The story that gives our call meaning is a story that is grounded in the hope and promise of the resurrection, an event that was so completely unexpected that even now it turns our world upside down and creates wonderfully life giving chaos.

The thing we have to remember is that our faith story is not about us being in control. Our faith story is about God's Spirit continuously leading us and guiding us. It is about God's Spirit continually challenging us and plopping us down in places that are outside our comfort zones. Our story, the Story that gives our lives and faith meaning never comes to a place where things settle down and we take control. God's Spirit from the very beginning of time has always been on the move, shaking things up, putting God's people in unexpected situations and places. From the beginning, God's Spirit has been actively working on behalf of the Gospel message and for the benefit for God's people, moving across the waters of chaos, leading the people through the wilderness, bringing the people back from

exile, sweeping through upper rooms, sending apostles on their way, and most importantly overcoming the grave so that we might have new life.

The good news is that although it may seem like whenever the Holy Spirit is around there is chaos, we know as the people of God better. there is stability, stability and security that can only be find in the presence of God. which is our true constant in life. which is the anchor that helps us face the stormy seas. Which is the blessing that helps us move with the current of transformation instead of fighting it. We know that something constant dwells within us and that constant is the presence of God.

The good news is that God is not made anxious by change. God is not bothered by unrest. In the midst of our seemingly chaotic lives and churches, God stands with us as we continue our journey of becoming the people God created us to be. The good news is that we can marvel at this journey and make it through the unexpected patches that stretch out before us all because we know God is dwelling in us. God is our one and true constant, always guiding us, always leading us. So we have no fear inviting the Holy Spirit into our churches and into our lives, to wake up from our state of apathy, so that we can truly experience the Kingdom of God in our midst. We have no fear leaving our comfort zones and finding ourselves in unexpected places all for the sake of the Gospel message. We have no fear embracing the risks that come along by being the people God created us to be.

We have no fear talking to the stranger and embracing them as our sisters and brothers. We have no fear inviting all to come to the table. We have no fear sharing the Good News of God's love. All because we know that God is there in the midst of it all, helping us become the people God created us to be, like God has always done for God's people, since the beginning of time.

We have no fear inviting the Holy Spirit in and finding ourselves expecting the unexpected. Because we know God is there, like God has always been.

May we invite the Holy Spirit into our lives and in our church and enjoy the ride it brings. Amen.