

3 Epiphany, January 24, 2014

**Water Buckets, Wake Up Calls,
and the Holy Spirit**

The Rev. Deborah Woolsey

Church of the Good Shepherd, Athens, Ohio

British minister Steve Chalke has written a parable for the church. His parable goes like this: One day, a young woman looked outside her window and saw a raging fire. The fire was not too big that it couldn't be stopped, but she knew it would get bigger if no one did anything to fight it. She grabbed a bucket, filled it with water, and ran to do what she could to fight the fire. Outside her door, she saw a group of firefighters, all of them fast asleep. This situation presented her with a new opportunity: she could use the water in her bucket to wake up the sleeping fire fighters by throwing the water on them. Or she could press on to the fire and fight the flames herself. What do you think she should do? Wake the sleeping firefighters? Or fight the flames?

There is a lot to be said about using her water to wake up the firefighters; she can always join them in fighting the fire after they've woken up, and there is more chance they'd actually put the fire out if there were more people working together, especially when the majority of those people have the resources and training to do so.

Steve uses this parable as a wakeup call to the church; not to remind the church that there are lots of problems in the world that need work, because the church knows that. But to remind the church that we have the means to address those many problems, often in ways no other part of society does, and we need to join in the work.

This parable reminds me of Jesus' return to his hometown in our Gospel this morning. We heard that Jesus returned still radiating that Holy Spirit Presence and Power, which may have been why he was getting noticed wherever he went. And we heard it seems no one had anything but good things to say about him.

It is with such an impressive reputation that Jesus returned to the very synagogue in the very town he had grown up in. To the place where people not only remembered him, but thought they knew him.

And it is to this congregation that Jesus read from the Scriptures and preached what might just be the shortest sermon ever: “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Many commentators and scholars tell us this statement was Jesus saying that he is the Messiah; the anointed one. Since he arrived filled with the Holy Spirit, that was his anointing, and was using those words from scriptures to show hometown who he was.

I wonder, though, if the author of Luke’s Gospel had an additional intention. If we look once again at the words Jesus read, some of us might recognize the words are from parts of Isaiah, from the Old Testament, and there was actually much more Jesus could have read, but instead he chose only to mention: “bringing good news to the poor, proclaiming release to captives, recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free and proclaiming a year of the Lord’s favor.”

Maybe Jesus was so selective in what he chose to read because the author of Luke was using those words as a wakeup call to the congregation Jesus visited. A wake up call that not only said he was the Messiah but what that amazing statement means. For the author of Luke it might mean a bit more than as Messiah it was only Jesus’ mission was to pay attention to the poor, the blind, and the captive and oppressed people. If that was only Jesus’ mission, then the rest of us could sit back and say well, isn’t that special, because it is just about Jesus and doesn’t mean much to you and me.

But I’m not sure Luke would let us off so easy. Scholars like to remind us Luke wrote two books, the Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, and in Acts Luke talks about the Holy Spirit being present not only with Jesus, but also with the Church.

In the section we heard from Paul’s Letter to the Corinthians, we were reminded the church, often referred to as the Body of Christ, isn’t just priests and leaders, it is everyone who is a member: adults and children, the employed and unemployed, people of every gender, the wealthy, middle class, and the poor, the married, divorced, the single, people of every race and color, conservative and liberal, people of every sexual orientation, all who are baptized in Christ are part of Christ. There are no exceptions. The Holy Spirit is with all of us for a purpose, and sometimes it is good to get a wakeup call, a reminder about that purpose.

Last year, the General Convention of the Episcopal Church elected our new Presiding Bishop. Immediately after his election, Bishop Michael Curry boldly proclaimed that he sees the Episcopal Church as being what he calls the Jesus Movement. As the Jesus Movement, we are to do just as we heard Jesus proclaim in our Gospel today; to go to those who most often are overlooked, or purposefully ignored, or pitied, or told to be quiet, even if they are not members of our parish. Bishop Curry didn't preach about getting higher church attendance, increasing programming, or building beautiful buildings. He preached that we need to be bringers of God's love to the hurting, the outcast, those who may have given up on the church as having any meaningful purpose in their life.

While many might perceive Bishop Curry's call to be the Jesus Movement to be a bit hokey or naive, I see it as a wakeup call the same as Jesus' preached in the synagogue in his hometown in Luke's Gospel and the bucket of water in the face of the sleeping firefighters. Sometimes the church can get so caught up in things like maintaining what we have to care for that we forget what our purpose is. We can work so hard at trying to do things the way they've always been done we miss the opportunities to wake each other up to meet the needs that have changed around us. Sometimes we get so darn tired of dealing with changes we just like to keep church a place where we can rest from change and only take comfort in the Holy Spirit that we unintentionally end up taking the Spirit's presence for granted. This isn't bad, it's human, it happens, and sometimes we need rest, we need healing, we need to be renewed. Which is why we also need those people like our Presiding Bishop who throw buckets of water, who remind us why we are healed, why we are refreshed and renewed: to remind us we are part of a movement centered around Jesus and empowered by the Holy Spirit to reach out to others who need that same healing, that same hope we are blessed to receive.

One year ago today, my family and I started our ministry with you. I remember it as a day so full, not only of joy and happiness, but a day filled with the Holy Spirit, who brought us together. Every day since then we have grown together: we've shared some joyful times, some sad times, healing times, busy times, quiet times, we've celebrated holy days, birthdays, and we've eaten a lot of cake. Perhaps today it is even more meaningful that we receive this reminder that the Holy Spirit brought us together, and is still with us. Not just so we can grow together, but so that together we can give good news to the poor, sight to the

blind, and work to free captive and the oppressed, that our ministry together can be an expression of God's love, that we are to be part of the Jesus Movement Bishop Curry is calling us to live into.

Since today is a special anniversary for us, it is a good day to remember how and why we came together, how we are growing together; the ways we worship and work together. It is a joy filled pleasure for me to worship with you all, to participate in our ministries like Free Lunch and Soul Biscuits, to work with the knitters by blessing and distributing prayer shawls, to attend a KAIROS prison ministry weekend closing worship service, to tag along every once and while with the worship service we provide to Lindly Inn, an assisted living facility here in Athens, to be present to the community of OU, to participate in the Interfaith panels, prayer vigils, and peace walk, and to provide a safe welcome and pastoral counsel to those who are hurting, afraid, and curious. These are ways we, you and me, have been living the Jesus Movement, as Bishop Curry encourages us. And while these are excellent works, we still might need a wake up reminder that the Holy Spirit is with us, which means we have God's Love in our midst, a love powerful enough to bring us together, a love so wonderful, so life-giving we just can't keep it to ourselves. So when we get worried, or frustrated, or angry at the injustices we encounter in the world, we can remember we don't have to feel powerless, we have the healing balm right here, not just as comfort, but something we can take to hurting outside our doors.

Today my family and I are deeply grateful for you all, as we are deeply grateful for the ways the Holy Spirit works. And I am curious to see what ways we will continue to work together as the Jesus Movement; while the details are not known, what I do know is we however we will live into the Power of the Holy Spirit, we will do it together.