

Feast Day of St. Luke October 18, 2020
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Inspiration
Church of the Good Shepherd, Athens, OH

What inspires you?

For different people it is different things. Some people are inspired by a sports team that had one of those “Cinderella seasons”; those teams that no one noticed at the beginning of the season, or who the sportswriters said would not get very far but ended up through perseverance, teamwork, and luck going all the way to being the best team of the season. For others it is a biography or personal story about someone who overcame immense challenges, tragedies, setbacks, and eventually achieved success or happiness. Some find inspiration in the exploration of outer space, or the ocean. For others, it is a walk in the woods on a perfect day. Some people find inspiration in music, hearing songs or hymns or symphonies that lift them from sadness into hopefulness. For someone who inspired my husband and me, it was washing dishes that inspired him to write a song that inspires us.

The song is one of the rock band Bon Jovi’s newest called [*Do What You Can*](#). The band’s lead singer and songwriter, Jon Bon Jovi, came up with the song during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic when he and his family were working at his restaurant called Soul Kitchen in New Jersey. I have mentioned this restaurant before, because it inspired the pay-it-forward part of our coffee shop ministry CrossRoads Cafe. For more than ten years, Jon Bon Jovi and his wife have been running their three restaurants on a pay-it-forward model that allows everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status to come into a lovely restaurant, order and enjoy a delicious, filling, and healthy meal prepared by a world class chef. When it comes to payment, the customers are told their meal has already been paid for, and they are asked -if they can- to pay it forward for others either by giving money or volunteering to work at bussing tables, serving, cleaning, working in the garden, or joining Jon Bon Jovi in the kitchen washing dishes when he isn’t touring with his band. During the pandemic, Soul Kitchen was deemed an essential business, but because they could not operate with volunteers like they usually do because of COVID restrictions, it was Jon Bon Jovi and his family who showed up day after day, helped the chef prepare the food, served to go meals, and did the cleaning. While Jon was washing dishes one day, his wife Dorteia took his picture for social media and asked him what the caption should be.

In interviews he has given recently, Jon said at the time he did not realize his wife was asking for the hours they were going to be open. Instead, he said the words that came to him while he was washing dishes, “When you can’t do what you do, you

do what you can.” The next morning, he woke up and said to himself, “Now that sounds like a Bon Jovi song.” So he went to work writing the music and words to the song that has become like an anthem for many people, inspiring us to live with hope during the pandemic, to focus on what we can do instead of what we can’t and in so doing perhaps lift the spirits of others. I’ve asked Ted to put a link to the video for this song in the Sunday email, and even if you aren’t a fan of Bon Jovi or the genre, I encourage you to watch the video because it is powerful. You might even find it inspiring.

Inspiration is that sensation you get when you feel like you are being filled with something that makes you excited, encouraged, creative. It is as if you have had life breathed into you.

In today’s Gospel, we see Jesus was inspired. But he was not inspired by his favorite sport team, or some scientific endeavor of exploration, he wasn’t even inspired by a song. He was filled directly with the life-giving Holy Spirit.

What we don’t see in today’s Gospel reading is Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit at his baptism; when he rose out of the water and the Holy Spirit descended from heaven looking something like a dove and rested upon him. It was Jesus’ baptism that inspired him, empowered him, filled him with the Holy Spirit and this is how Jesus began his ministry of salvation here on earth that started the kingdom of God work of healing the spiritual divide between humanity and God, and liberated people from the fear and anger and oppression that prohibited them from living into the dream God has for every human being.

It is important for us to remember this today not only because we are celebrating the Feast of St. Luke the Apostle, but because we are going to baptize Isabelle Schaefer this morning at the 10:30 outdoor service. Every baptism we celebrate is more than an opportunity to welcome a new member of the Body of Christ. Every baptism is an important reminder for each and every one of us that through the sacrament of baptism, we are connected to each other and to Jesus through the Holy Spirit. This connection was created at our baptisms when we were sealed with the same Holy Spirit that filled Jesus and marks us as his own.

What it means to be Christ’s own, as the words of the baptismal service explains it, is our baptism connects us to Jesus’ death and his resurrection, making us not his property, but signs of his resurrection life. We are the embodiment of Jesus’ resurrection, which means in a world that is filled with fear, that strives for division and hoarding, where greed and violence are called good, those who are baptized and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit are to behave differently. We are to shine with the

peace of the Risen Christ, to continue his work of healing, restoring relationships when we can through forgiveness and love, to participate in God's life-giving liberating love freeing ourselves and others from oppression caused by sexism, racism, ageism, and discrimination in all its ugly forms.

How we are to live into such faith is found in the Baptismal Covenant on pages 304-305 in the *Book of Common Prayer*. Every time we baptize someone, we renew our baptismal vows by reciting the covenant that first reminds of our beliefs, and then reminds us our beliefs aren't just words we say, they are how we are to live, they help define our daily personal and corporate practices. These include continuing the teachings and fellowship of the apostles, which means gathering together to study and serve together, to form a community. To break bread, which refers both to sharing Holy Eucharist and sharing meals. To pray together. To resist evil and to repent of our sins and turn, change direction by changing our behavior. To proclaim through our whole lives that those good things the world rejects and that which grows old, God renews and restores to life. In our baptismal covenant we are asked if we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves and if we will strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being. Even those human beings we disagree with. Even those human beings that hurt or reject us. Even those human beings who we suspect voted differently than we did. Even those human beings we just cannot stand.

All that is the stuff of resurrection life, and it is not easy. Which is why the answer we give in the baptismal covenant is always, "We will with God's help." I like that we don't say "I do", and instead we say, "I will". To me that means this is not a one-time promise we do only on this day. Instead it is a promise for this and every day to come; we will today, and tomorrow, and the next day, and the next, and the next and every next day. And always with God's help. We recognize that our community is not just us, not just you and me, it is a community who at its heart is the life-giving God who made us and loves us all tremendously.

That help can manifest in many forms: In one another, in a person seeking to be baptized, our community, our diocese, a friend, a family member, an invitation we had not expected, in a rest, maybe even in tasks like mowing the lawn, taking a walk, or washing dishes, anything that fills us with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and gives us what we need to pass that spark of inspiration on to others to see through any difficult time to the resurrection life that really is in our midst is God at work in us.

Today we can especially find inspiration in Isabelle's commitment to join us in this life's work of love and service we call faith. During a time when others refrain

from commitment because of the fear and uncertainty of the pandemic, Isabelle is reminding us of the deep desire for Christ's healing and loving presence by following her inspiration to be baptized into Christ's Body. Thank you, Isabelle, for the reminder of Whose we are, what we are, what we are called to and what we can do, no matter what time we live in. You are an inspiration to us all.