



Saint John United Methodist Church
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Message for May 31, 2020
“Overcomers: Power over Circumstance”
Speaker: Pastor Tom Grieb
Scripture: John 14:25-31

Reflections on Covid-19

We will all have to agree that the Covid-19 Pandemic has been something else. It has been nothing like any of us has ever experienced.

While that’s the case, the pandemic has offered all sorts of new opportunities and different ways of doing. Every one of us has been stretched.

In regard to the church, we agreed early on that we would be doing church differently. We have had to depend on social media and virtual worship. We have had to gather for meetings and small groups via Zoom.

Here are just a couple of groups who are meeting regularly.

In regard to Zoom I have certainly grown tired of looking at myself.

In regard to social media I never thought I would be a TikTok Influencer. A couple of months ago, I had never even heard of TikTok. Over the weeks we’ve had 22,000 views and counting. If you need a good laugh, check them out. Some of my dancing has been the longest fifteen seconds of my life. 😊

You need to say thanks to the staff for the way they have adjusted and met the challenge and opportunity of the season in which we find ourselves.

- Kyle Ray and the members of our various worship teams have really stepped up to the plate.
- Larry Smith and those working with him immediately came to our rescue and got us on line in a big way.
- Catherine Detweiler has been so flexible and has stepped in where needed. She has helped us stay connected.
- And speaking of helping us stay connected, Lisa Leonard has coached us all through the ins and outs of ZOOM. She has certainly earned a PhD in Zoomology.
- Joe Wright has been our resident expert on the CARES Act and has guided us in the right direction every step of the way.
- Betsy Keefe and Steven Lundy have reached out in wonderful and imaginative ways to our children and youth.

- Ashlee Adkins has proven to be the sort of utility player we needed at a time such as this. She has been helpful in all sorts of ways.
- Diane Smith and Shelly Nivens have taken into consideration the needs of each family as well as the needs of each employee that support their ministries.
- Bob Gonya and Dennis Brooks and their team have kept the church well-cleaned and sanitized.

And just think of it, we have only begun to emerge. We are living into a new day that continues to evolve.

We Need Your Help, O God

We need your help, O God. And speaking of help, let's read about the help, or shall I say, the helper God provides. During this weekend in which we celebrate Pentecost, let's read about the promise of the Holy Spirit, the very one who comes to help us.

"All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

"You heard me say, 'I am going away and I am coming back to you.' If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

"Come now; let us leave." (John 14:25-31)

Circumstances and Their Influence upon Us

Circumstances sure have a way of affecting us. The recent pandemic is testimony to that, if anything is. It's all in how we deal with them. We can let them get to us or we can skate right on through them.

We have all repeated the phrase *"under the circumstances."* Someone will ask, *"How you doing?"* And we will respond, *"Not too bad, under the circumstances."* The circumstances these days haven't been all that easy, and for some, things have been downright oppressive.

We've had to face the prospects of:

- staying at home together
- homeschooling
- a lack of childcare
- uncertainty regarding work and finances
- even own health and the health of our loved ones

For some, dealing with these challenging circumstances has been a matter of meeting them head-on and moving right through them. They have simply gritted their teeth and persevered. That's not necessarily a bad thing, save for the fact that if left to our own energy, sooner or later, we are apt to wear out, if not give up.

I have said often, *"God is with us, regardless of our circumstance. In the good and not so good, God is with us. He provides for us in every way and we'd do well to put our faith in him."*

I like what F. B. Meyer has to say about such things, *"Unbelief puts our circumstances between us and God, while faith puts God between us and our circumstances."*

God's every desire is to provide just what we need in the moment, regardless of circumstance. The power and presence of the Holy Spirit is very much a part of that provision.

The Promise of the Holy Spirit

As we talked last week, Christ's every desire in the days leading up to his death was to lay it all out to his disciples. Jesus knew their way would not be easy. He knew that their circumstances had the potential to far outweigh their ability to deal with them.

Last week we read that great passage from John 14:1 where Jesus encouraged his disciples by saying, *"Let not your hearts be troubled, just believe."*

Jesus went on to offer the promise of eternal life for those who so believed. Later in that same chapter, words we read just a few minutes ago, Christ offers yet another promise. He promised that his disciples he would not leave them void. Even though he would not be long with them, he promised that God would soon be sending the Holy Spirit in his stead.

"Let not your hearts be troubled," he said. *"Do not be afraid."*

Jesus is serious about the notion of our hearts *"not being troubled."* He really does care about the disposition of our hearts.

As with the disciples, you and I are not alone. The Spirit of God is in our midst, regardless of circumstance. God always stands by his people. That's good news for the times in which we live.

Connecting to Our Source of Power

I have thought for a long time that *"the Holy Spirit is the present reality of God's presence in the life of the world."*

When we think of the Holy Spirit we think immediately of power and we come by that honestly. At Pentecost God sent the Holy Spirit and his power was evident. In that power the church was birthed. The Spirit came in all power. The Spirit's coming was marked by the powerful *"rush of a mighty wind."* *"Tongues of fire"* rested on every person who was present.

We are now many centuries removed from that great event and, regrettably, find ourselves disconnected in varying degrees from the power God so longs to give us through his Spirit.

Whenever a lamp doesn't light, one of the first things we will look at is whether the lamp is plugged in.

With that in mind:

- We'd do well to get connected to the source of power God offers each of us in the Holy Spirit.
- We'd do well not to hold on too tightly and let God do his thing.
- We'd do well not to so much rely on our own energy, but God's power coursing through us.

Connecting to the Source of All Help and Strength

In talking about the Holy Spirit, Jesus doesn't so much talk about power as he does presence. He talks about the same Spirit he just has a different take on things.

Jesus talks about the Spirit in four separate passages in the Gospel of John, specifically John 14:16, John 14:26, John 15:26, and John 16:7.

I encourage you to read all Jesus says about the Spirit in John 14-16, as he prepares his disciples for what was to come. What Jesus says is a word for us as well as we face the rigor of the circumstances that befall us.

Jesus talks about the Spirit in terms of being an Advocate, a Counselor, a Comforter, and a Helper.

The Greek word used here is *paracletos*, which is understood as "one who walks alongside." *Paraclete* is a term that would have been used in the legal world.

- A *paraclete* is like a witness who testifies on behalf of an individual or an attorney who vigorously defends somebody.
- A *paraclete* is one who is called in to support, counted on in a time of emergency, and seeks to help in the midst of all of life's circumstances.
- A *paraclete* comforts and sustains, guards and guides, strengthens and supports.

We repeat it in the Modern Affirmation that's listed in our *Book of Hymns*.

"We believe in the Holy Spirit as the divine presence in our lives, whereby we are kept in perpetual remembrance of the truth of Christ, and find strength and help in time of need."

Walking Alongside

As we have already said, circumstances have a way of weighing us down. Sometimes our circumstances seem as though they are crashing in around us.

For me, I like to take things one at a time. I seem to handle them better that way. Life though has a way of piling on. I have come to know that the Holy Spirit stands to help at such times by walking alongside me, helping me to make it through whatever I am facing. In a word, the Holy Spirit helps me overcome. I have found that to be the case the past several weeks in facing the backwash of Covid-19.

The Psalmist asks in Psalm 139:7-10, "*Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?*"

If I go to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.” (Psalm 139:7-10)

A little boy was on a camping trip with his dad. At dusk they found a place to camp for the night. As they prepared the camp site, the little boy tried to push a rock close to the fire so he could sit on it. The rock though was too heavy.

“Use all your resources,” said the dad as the kid complained about not being able to move the rock.

*“I **am** using all my resources,”* the little boy replied. *“No you aren’t,”* said the dad. *“You haven’t asked me.”*

Questions to Consider

How about some questions to consider:

- As you push against the heavy loads of life, have you asked the Holy Spirit to assist you?
- As you wade through the uncertainty and challenge of this pandemic have you sought the help of God’s Spirit?
- As you wade through the loss and grief we talked about last week, have you asked the Holy Spirit to comfort you?
- As you make difficult decisions, have you asked the Holy Spirit to counsel you?
- As you seek to make your way forward, have you sought the Holy Spirit to guide you?

The Holy Spirit is ready to help and will see you through.

Peace

“Peace I leave with you;” says Jesus, *“my peace I give to you.”*

There is calm in the midst of the storm. Circumstances don’t have to get the better of us. We will overcome in the power, presence, and peace of the Holy Spirit.

“Come, Holy Spirit, and fill the hearts of your faithful.”

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.