

11/10/2019

“The Spirit Abides”

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17; Haggai 2:4c-5; Psalm 145:1-5, 10-13

Series: Abiding in the Reign

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost

Theme: We abide or remain in God’s Kingdom or reign by the power of the Holy Spirit.

We continue our sermon series this month on Abiding in the Reign, that is living and staying in the kingdom or reign of God in and over our lives.

As I said last Sunday, that reign begins with a decision or choice that we make to accept Jesus as our Savior and Lord.

And if you have done so already as I hope you have, you realize, as I do, that it is often faced with challenges and uncertainty. We can easily be distracted and even fall away.

Or we may get discouraged and give up. We can feel at times that we are stuck in a rut, just spinning our wheels and getting nowhere. We may get nostalgic and fix ourselves on days of old, “glory days,” when everything seemed so great and easy.

And we may even feel like God is no longer with us. We might “lose the feeling” or the spirit.

Some of you here, or those you know, may be going through such a time, or have been at some time or another. It could be in your home life, at work, or even in church. We often forget or overlook the Spirit at work in our lives.

But I’m here to tell today that the Bible gives us not only assurance, but wisdom, guidance, encouragement, and power to stay in the kingdom of God! Our message today is that “**The Spirit Abides.**”

And we abide or remain in God’s Kingdom or reign by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The good news is . . .

† **The Holy Spirit is doing new and wonderful things within and among us in creative demonstrations of faithfulness to God.**

The truth is, God has been doing new and wonderful things within and among us in every generation. Centuries before the birth of Jesus, God sent the prophet Haggai to the exiled people of Judah. You may recall that the city of Jerusalem, including the great Holy Temple, had been destroyed -- and many of its people, along with its golden objects and other wealth, were taken to Babylon, where its people were in exile for sixty years.

When Cyrus the great of Persia conquered Babylon, he let some of the Judeans return to rebuild the city walls of Jerusalem. And when Darius the First became the ruler of Persia in 522 BCE, he sent Zerubbabel to be governor of Judah. Then God sends the prophet to Zerubbabel with a word. And that word was, "How are we doing?"

Zerubbabel was supposed to finish the building of the temple that his predecessor began. There was only a foundation at this point, and it was not much to look at. Haggai essentially says, "Does anyone remember what it used to look like? And how does it look now? To paraphrase . . . "Not so great, am I right?"

Haggai then proclaims (2:4-9 NRSV) . . .

*"Yet now take courage, O Zerubbabel, says the LORD; take courage, O Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; take courage, all you people of the land, says the LORD; work, for I am with you, says the LORD of hosts, according to the promise that I made you when you came out of Egypt. **My spirit abides among you**; do not fear.*

"For thus says the LORD of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land;

"and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendor, says the LORD of hosts.

"The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the LORD of hosts.

"The latter splendor of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts; and in this place I will give prosperity, says the LORD of hosts."

Rev. Derek Weber, the Director of Discipleship Miniseries of the UMC says . . .

"The words from God speak about God more than about the temple. The glory of any building said to represent God and house the people of God is really more about God than about buildings. "My Spirit abides," God says through Haggai; that's the glory you need to focus on, not the building and not who's here and who's not here.

"True, we want the place to be a place that speaks of God; and we need to take care of what we've been handed down. But God says, "I've got all the gold in the world; I've got all the silver; it's already mine." You can't honor God by giving something that God

already owns! Stuff happens out there in the world; God is moving; pay attention to that. Seek the glory of God in the Spirit that abides.” he says.

While I was going through this past week, and the places and emotions I’ve felt, I couldn’t help but reflect on these words. As I believe I shared last Sunday, Ellen Hews, a dear friend who was a former parishioner and leader of Norwood UMC passed away within an hour or so of when Karen and I planned to visit her last Friday. Since her pastor is away and would not be returning from an overseas sabbatical trip until next week, I agreed to lead her funeral service.

As I finished preparing my sermon for last Sunday’s All Saints celebration, I thought of her and others who have passed on to be with the Lord.

I spent a full day on Monday working from home, mostly on membership updates, revising a few Charge Conference reports, the stewardship pieces, and sermon study.

Tuesday was spent in further prayer and preparation before coming to church, getting the Consecration of Gifts mailing together, and praying for each household that would receive them.

I spent part of Wednesday meeting with the family of Ellen, to share memories and plan her service. Returning home, I spent more time in study and sermon planning.

Thursday I went to the Wilmington District Clergy meeting at Dale Memorial Church in Middletown. What a wonderful, Spirit-filled and uplifting worship and fellowship time together with colleagues in ministry! Then I visited our dear brother, Jim Prigel, whom many of you know lost his wife Midge, a beloved church member, just a year ago. It sometimes amazes me how he always has a good spirit, thankful for family and others nearby to be with and assist him. And he’s always interested in how things are going here at church. And if that were not enough, I had the pleasure of meeting his newest home-aid, Dorrie, who is a friend and neighbor of one of our newer church families right here in town. As we talked about faith, life’s journey, and the church, I mentioned my interest in starting Café Conversations. It has taken a side seat for one reason or another over the past year, including having a new disciples/members class, and I wasn’t sure if God was still calling me to start it. But as I described it, she said that she would be interested. She also believes that another friend might even come.

Friday was spent mostly with the Thanksgiving of the Life of Ellen Hews, as the family decided to call it. It was a very special time of worship and fellowship, with many folks Karen and I haven’t seen in several years.

And yesterday I spent mostly finishing up and getting ready for today.

What am I saying? Just this, we need to trust that God is at work in all things. If we stay focused on what matters most to God, we will sense God's presence and Spirit, giving us direction and power for each day. We may not always see clearly what is in store, but we can always trust God's presence and power. And when we do that, God will fill His house, and yours, with His glory. God will provide and prosper you.

The other thing to remember then is this . . .

† **Stand firm in the faith and salvation through Jesus, as well as his teachings, encouraged with strength through the power of the Holy Spirit.**

When you feel distracted or discouraged, remember that Jesus came to save you. Learn and stand on his teachings, his way of life. Remember that you are not alone. Jesus is in our midst as he has promised. And our Heavenly Father sent the Holy Spirit to comfort, counsel and advocate for us. The Holy Spirit will also continue to work within us to draw us closer to the image of God in which we were created. As temples of the living God, the Holy Spirit will use our bodies and continue to work within and through us to reveal God's glory. We call that process sanctification.

As the Apostle Paul writes to the Thessalonians (2 Thess. 2:13-15 NIV) . . .

“But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, so that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter. May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.”

Friends, the Spirit is working in you and through you, so cling to this truth, to this hope. And then the glory of the reign of Christ will be revealed in your good works and in your words. This process of sanctification, too, is an “already” and “not yet”; that is what the author is pointing toward—giving thanks for the “already” and encouraging the “not yet.”

I rejoice in all that the Spirit has done in and through you and this congregation. And I encourage you and all of us to keep our eyes on the glory of God, as we seek to fulfill the mission and purpose God has for each of us and for our congregation together!

I'm not a golfer, but I enjoyed the illustration shared by Walter N. Maris of Missouri in the Upper Room recently ("Steadfast", UR 10/31/19). He says, "When I was younger, I played golf two or three times a week with friends in a company league. And I was fairly competitive. When I would have an especially good game, I would expect my next game to be even better. However, usually the next game would turn out to be one of my worst games of the year. I believe I focused on the good score I was going to achieve rather than giving my full attention to each shot I needed to make. Good golfers must constantly remind themselves to keep their eye on the ball to deliver each shot.

"In our service to the Lord, it is even more important to avoid becoming distracted. Daily demands can divert our attention from our relationship with God, and ambitions can distract us from our purpose. Throughout scripture we find reminders to keep our focus on God's purposes, as well as practices that can help us maintain our focus."

> So, what new and wonderful thing is God calling and empowering you to be a part of for his kingdom? It may be something you are already doing, at home, at work, in the church or community, just in a new or different way. Or, it may be something else you hadn't even considered. Pray about it. Think about it. Meditate on it. Then take a step of faith and act on it! I hope you will fill out a Ministry Menu and consecrate it to God next Sunday, so that I can further encourage or assist you with it too.

And always remember to abide or remain in God's Kingdom or reign by the power of the Holy Spirit!