

**A sermon preached by Rev. Jason Cashing at  
Clarence Presbyterian Church on May 19, 2024.**

**A NEW MINISTRY**

*<Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15>*

*Prayer: Come, O Holy Spirit, and indwell among us once more! May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing and acceptable to you, O Holy One, our Rock and Redeemer. Amen.*

What's your tether?

I mentioned, once before, how one of the hardest challenges to overcome in interior firefighting is the inability to see with any real accuracy in a smoke-filled, low-visibility situation. It's challenging enough in training, but when it's put into practice in real life situations it can become even more so. Moving around an area in which you can not only not see, but which is unfamiliar and contains any number of pieces of furniture, can be overwhelming to the point of being paralyzing. Moving through an unknown and undetermined space is difficult, to say the least. And yet, it is something that must be done. In an emergency situation, such as a fire, search and rescue must be enacted; there's no debating that point. But in life, there can be much the same kind of dynamic at play, even if the house is not on fire around you.

We often face, in life, new and unknown challenges. Even when we have prepared for them, trained for them, educated ourselves...it can be overwhelming, paralyzing, even. Facing a new job, moving to a new place, starting a new school or even a new school year - these all have the capacity to make us feel as if the way ahead of us is unseen and unknown. Similarly, looking ahead toward new endeavors in life or, for us particularly, new ministries of the church, can elicit similar feelings, even when we're excited and ready for such new things. As we've said before, and is worth validating on each and every occasion: new endeavors - in life and/or in ministry - bring with them feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. This is a natural reaction, and recognizing it for what it is actually allows us to be less guided or defined by such anxiety.

To help us in this effort, I am pleased to share two possible practices to keep us grounded in faith and mobile in response.

Remembering and recognizing that new situations elicit anxiety and resistance is a key practice. This is not always easy; in fact, common reaction is to be dismissive or dug-in with one's response. We see a prime example of this from the crowd that was gathered in Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost. Only they weren't gathered there for Pentecost; that was the new thing, the unknown and anxiety-producing thing that was happening. Rather, Jews from around the world were gathered in Jerusalem for Shavuot - the Festival of Weeks, thanksgiving for the Harvest, and the remembrance of the reception of the Law.

For these Jewish people, regardless of nationality or language, they were there to center themselves around the one thing that united them and grounded them: the Law, as it was handed down from God through Moses on Mt. Sinai. They were there to commemorate the way in which God had guided their daily living through the generations, the way in which God's presence was among the people and defined the people, even when they were far from the Ark, far from Jerusalem, even when they were in exile. The Law of the Torah is what grounded them.

And now something new was happening. Peter and the other apostles, through the presence and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate which Jesus spoke of, are able to speak to the people gathered of the new good news of the gospel, and in the language of each hearer. And the first reaction of this international gathering, their first thought? Did you catch it?

These disciples are drunk.

The first reaction to such a new thing, such an uncertain and anxiety-producing new thing, is to dismiss the apostles, dismiss the good news and the miracle that each person hears in their own language, by claiming that the only real explanation is that they're drunk. If only it were that easy.

In my younger days I spent a summer in Spain, living with a family there and experiencing Mediterranean culture outside of Valencia. I can tell you that the presence of good wine does not increase anyone's linguistic capabilities of a foreign language.

But the gathered crowd is attempting to explain away this new thing because, even with the potential benefits and good that will come from this new reality, it is uncertain and, therefore, uncomfortable. And the lesson for us is to remember that discomfort at new endeavors is not necessarily what should define or determine our response. Especially as we make ourselves vulnerably open to where the Spirit continues to lead us today. Tomorrow. In the weeks and months to come. By remembering our natural inclinations toward new things, we can ground ourselves in the faith to follow, trusting in the Spirit.

Which leads us to the other practice offered to us today: to seek to be mobile in our faith.

There is a tool in the fire service that enables firefighters to, with greater security, strike out into an unknown environment in which you cannot see. It's carried in a pocket of almost every firefighter I've known. It's so versatile that it's use is only limited by the imagination of the user.

It's a simple piece of webbing or robe. But when searching a room in which you can see nothing and have no idea what is present, when the landscape is unknown and it is almost a given that you can become disoriented and lost, having a piece of webbing is

invaluable. Because with it, you can anchor it at one known point, and then move out into the unknown space and explore it, knowing that you are tethered to a known point.

In deep sea diving and exploration this is known as a “downline” - an anchored line that a scuba diver can literally tether to when entering a cave or a shipwreck, so that they can find their way back out when the time comes. It is a resource that allows us to be more mobile in exploration and pushing boundaries of awareness and comfort. It allows us to go out further in faith, knowing that we are tethered to something that is anchored.

What is your tether? What is *our* tether? It’s not meant to be a trick question; in fact, the disciples were told by Jesus what their tether would be from the get-go.

This is our last Sunday in Jesus’ Farewell Discourse, so a last reminder that Jesus, in these chapters of John’s gospel, is preparing the disciples for what is to come next and what will follow that. Here, in today’s reading, he is telling them of the coming of the Advocate, the Holy Spirit which will indwell them and come upon them in fullness at Pentecost.

And the same Spirit which in-dwelt the disciples at Pentecost is the same Spirit which still indwells us today. In recent weeks we’ve been revisiting the stories of the early church, exploring where the Spirit led the disciples and how they were at work expanding the edges of the gospel proclamation. They were exploring, and going to unknown edges of ministry. They were in a new ministry. But it was not an un-tethered ministry, for everywhere they went, everyone they encountered, everyone they baptized and all the cultural boundaries that were crossed as strangers became family in faith...all of it was in the Spirit of God. The Advocate. The Paraclete. The person of the Divine Trinity which continues to go where it will and take us along for the ride.

But no matter how far out we go, how unknown is the landscape around us, how uncertain or anxious we may be, we are tethered in the Spirit. We are known, and we are not alone.

I do not know what new ministries or missions may come to us; at least, not at the moment. That, by itself, is somewhat anxiety-producing to me. But I do know that I, that we are tethered in the Spirit. Just as the apostles received the Spirit that day of Pentecost so long ago, so, too, do we receive the Spirit anew today. We do not just remember Pentecost; we relive Pentecost. May you know that you are tethered in the Spirit, and may you go out in the Spirit to proclaim the good news of the gospel in new and wondrous ways. You will not go alone. Amen.