

## Our Happy Place (3) - Spiritual Growth Yesterday's Sermon Summary

Yesterday, we focused on KW's 3rd core value, which reads - "Together, through scripture, study, and practice, we strive to grow in our love for God and those around us. Our intent is to grow in faith, hope, and love so that we become more like Jesus, which will prepare us to share God's good news. Led by God's Spirit, we will make faith and growth accessible to all who seek."



During the sermon, we laid out three basic biblical metaphors/images for the spiritual life, and thus for growing spirituality. All three are from the gospel of John, and each centers on the role of God's Spirit in our lives (in anticipation of Pentecost to come next Sunday, 5/19).

1) In John 3.5-7, we saw that growing spiritually is like being born a second time to a different kind of life

We all need to be born twice: once physically, charting the course of normal human development, but that's not enough on its own...we also need to be acted upon from the outside by God to be awakened spiritually. As Jesus will say later in John's gospel, "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless" (6.63). It is only in the combination of the two births that we rise to the heights of God's vision for what a human life can be when it's lived aware of and in partnership with Him.

"Spirit" in both the Old and New Testaments is a notoriously difficult word to translate, because it can carry one of several meanings. One is that our "spirit," similar to our "heart," "mind," and "soul," refers to the deepest recesses of who we are - our loves, values, fears, and hidden places. We should assume that this second birth will occur in our "spirits," affecting, challenging, and transforming us in the most profound ways. As St. Augustine of Hippo (354 - 430 A.D.) said it, "May the Holy Spirit live plentifully in our hearts, and bring cheerful light to every dark corner of our souls."

2) In John 3.8, we saw that growing spiritually is like being a sail that catches the wind of God's Spirit

In this verse, Jesus uses "spirit" in a different way, meaning "wind" or "breath." This meaning of "spirit" traces its way all the back to creation itself, when God's "spirit/wind" hovered over and brought order to the chaos (Gen. 1.2) and was breathed into humanity, making us living creatures (Gen. 2.7).

Presbyterian pastor Joan Gray notes that Christians often live according to either rowboat or sailboat spirituality. In a rowboat, you determine where you want to head, often look backward more than forward, and eventually tire out. The goal instead, in line with John 3.8, is to be a sailboat Christian, God alone being our chief guide and infinite source of power, blowing and directing as He pleases, not as we do.

What God's Spirit is trying to do in our lives is fairly predictable: the apostle Paul, for example, says that its fruit will always be things like love, faithfulness, patience, joy, self-control, etc. (Gal. 5.22-23). But the how, where, to whom, when, and why is entirely unpredictable, and no doubt God will surprise us over and over again. So do we live in a such a way that our sails up, ready to catch God's Spirit and be carried along by Him, not mattered which direction that might be?

So we pray time and again something similar to this from Rev. Scott Cervas (Meadowthorpe Presbyterian Church, Charlotte, NC): "Keep moving, we plead, O Wind and Spirit of God. Keep moving around us, among us, and within us. Keep moving us so that we can join You as creators of divine movement in our world that seems to be stuck in place, amen."

3) Last, we jumped to the last night of Jesus' earthly life, and saw that in John 14.16-17, growing spiritually is like being at home with God's Spirit

Jesus says that God's Spirit will come to "abide" in us. To abide means to remain with, to stay with, or, even more evocatively, to make a home with.

This is a fascinating turn of phrase: Jesus claims that it is not we who make a home with God's Spirit, but God's Spirit that makes a home with us, as if we are estranged or wandering within our own lives and need God's Spirit to take up residence in order for us to finally come home to Him...and ourselves.

Mary Luti, a United Church of Christ pastor, muses that the word "abide" has fallen out of common usage because our world is not an "abiding" kind of place anymore. We're too busy and stressed, and live too fast; we don't linger or relish much of anything, we don't slow down in order to connect, and, as such, we feel at home nowhere in our lives.

This leads Presbyterian pastor Lindsay Armstrong to write, "Jesus knew our tendencies and addresses them here. You are going to have to abide, He says. Not because the kingdom work is finished, not because everyone knows I am the way, the truth, and the life, not because there is nothing more you could be doing, but because abiding is what is best for your relationship with Me...No matter how tempted we are to be busy for God, Jesus does not leave us with a to-do list. He calls us to reject the notion that constant action gives us significance...We are called, first and last, simply to abide."

## More on Spiritual Growth this Week

- Here's the full text of the hymn "Abide with Me," written by Anglican pastor Henry Francis Lyte in 1847 as he lay dying of tuberculosis (the 2nd link is to a simple performance of the tune): [Abide With Me](#) and [Abide With Me - Audrey Assad](#)
- 9 min. whiteboard video on the key components of growing spiritually - worship, fellowship, and discipleship: [The BEST ways to accelerate Spiritual GROWTH! - Whiteboard Series](#)
- So how exactly do we gauge our spiritual growth, courtesy of Dallas Willard: [How Do We Assess Spiritual Growth?](#)
- Spiritual habits/routines (or "disciplines") are how we open the door and let God into our lives to do the work only He can do: [Spiritual Disciplines are an Invitation - Nathan Foster](#)
- On being a "sailboat" church, not a "rowboat" church: [being a sailboat church](#)