

Date: Sunday July 19, 2009

Scripture: Mark 6:30-34; 50-53

Title: “Spiritual Renewal”

The Message of Scripture (Sermon Thesis): We must be attentive to our spiritual needs just as we are, if not more so, to our physical needs.

The Sharing of the Good News (The Sermon Purpose): God’s love is refreshing and renewing. We are called by Jesus to be attentive to the ways we can be washed by that love.

(Remember, it’s all about God!)

I have had the opportunity to fly in and out of Houston’s Hobby Airport. If you have been there you know it is crowded and cramped. During one of the rush hours there, a flight was delayed due to a mechanical problem. Since the airline needed the gate for another flight, the aircraft was backed away from the gate while the maintenance crew worked on it. The passengers were then told the new gate number, which was some distance away. Everyone moved to the new gate, only to find a third gate had been designated for them. After some further shuffling, everyone got on board, and as they were settling in, the flight attendant made the standard announcement, “We apologize for the inconvenience of this last-minute gate change. This flight is going to Washington, D.C. If your destination is not Washington, D.C., then you should ‘deplane’ at this time.” At that point a very confused-looking and red-faced pilot emerged from the cockpit, carrying his bags. “Sorry,” he said, “wrong plane.” (www.basicjokes.com).

It’s a good thing that announcement was made. There is another

announcement made onboard any commercial airliner in the U.S. Whenever flying we will hear the flight attendant covering the safety instructions and inevitably talking about what to do if the cabin should lose pressure and the oxygen masks would deploy. The rule is that if that happens, as it did just this past week with the Southwest Airlines plane flying from Baltimore to Nashville and having a hole open in the top of the fuselage, you put own you own oxygen mask before putting the mask on any child that might be travelling with you. The idea is that you must make sure you can breathe correctly so that you can then help the children that may require your assistance. You have to take care of yourself in order to be able to help others.

All this leads up to the Gospel lesson for today. Jesus had sent the twelve disciples out to preach and teach in the surrounding villages. The disciples came back with stories of all they were able to accomplish in the name of God. Jesus knew exactly what they were feeling because he had experienced the same things with his preaching and teaching and healing.

Now think about the story of how Jesus healed the woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years. She snuck up on him while he was walking through the crowd and simply touched the hem of his garment and he knew in an instant that someone had touched him. If you recall, the disciples tried to minimize Jesus' concern about who had touched him – of course he had been touched because he was in the middle of a crowd. But Jesus knew something was different. He knew someone had touched him with a particular need and he had felt the power flow out

of himself.

We don't always realize that when we interact with people day in and day out, when we are willing to share a word of faith with them or to be with them showing care and compassion or to offer a word of prayer with them, that it can be very draining, both physically and spiritually draining. Whenever we are physically drained we need to rest and renew. Being spiritually drained is no different. We need refreshment and refueling.

Now our physical needs are more easily recognized. At times we feel tired, our stomachs might growl, or we could have a headache. We know what to do to if any of those occur. A headache might call for a pain reliever. If we are hungry, and we are fortunate enough, we find something to eat. If we are tired we start to notice our eyes getting heavy, our heads might nod and we start yawning a lot. I know none of that is happening right now. But when those actions do start happening then we need to seek out a place to get some sleep or take a nap or at the very least, find the opportunity to close our eyes and reenergize with quiet time. Rest helps us feel renewed and reinvigorated.

Do you know what it feels like to be spiritually tired? What might be the signs that we are spent spiritually and need to care for our spirits so that we are rested and renewed as spiritual beings? So many times we simply ignore the spiritual aspect of our beings but like our physicality, our spirituality hungers to be fed. There are those times we wonder why we feel down in the dumps or even depressed, sometimes life seems to lose the pizzazz that it once had. There are

those times that our anxiety gets the best of us. These can all be indications that our spirituality needs to be nurtured.

Jesus knew how excited the disciples were from their preaching excursion. He enjoyed listening to all that God had done through them. He also knew how tired they must be for he knew what it was like to go out and preach, teach, and heal. He knew that all of those efforts took a toll on a person, both physically and spiritually. Jesus knew that as revved up as the disciples were, they would need time to recoup. He cared about them and their feelings. According to our scripture this morning, he said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest for awhile” (Mark 6:31). Jesus knew that they would need to rest the body and renew their spirits. He sought to assist them in getting refueled. He knew they needed that time for what they had been through and for what they would go through.

This attention to body and to spirit was an issue of great importance to Jesus. In another part of Mark, Jesus went off to the mountain to pray by himself (6:46). He sets an example of how we are to care for ourselves. He lives the rule that if we don't take care of ourselves, we won't be able to take care of others.

This raises the question, how is your spirit and how do you refresh your spirit at those times it needs refreshed? The children sang this morning about letting their lights shine. What must we do to let our flame burn and our light shines? Could it be spending time in prayer with God, telling God what is going on in life, and allowing time to listen for God's answer. Perhaps it is time studying God's word by

reading scripture or reading a devotional that connects to scripture or both. Is there a time during the day that is important to a thriving spirituality such as early in the morning before the day really gets going or late at night reflecting on the events of the day? Maybe there's a special place in nature to commune with God; it might be the mountains, the coastline, a sacred place in the backyard yard, the garden, or a lawn chair on the porch. There's the possibility that getting lost in a good book or being embraced by a beautiful song is a spiritual cure. Being right here in church might be the answer for spiritual needs. Whatever the way, we need to name and practice the tune that helps our heart to sing.

The other morning I came over to the study from the parsonage as my day was getting underway. It was one of those days when I was feeling out of sorts. There wasn't anything that was exactly right. It was too hot, I had a lot of work to do, but nothing I really wanted to work on. I had plenty of rest the night before, but still felt tired. I had worked out the night before but it felt like I hadn't worked out in days. I had breakfast but it wasn't satisfying. You know the feeling? It was a great big case of the blahs. Then I sat down and started to write a prayer. "Dear God, you have blessed me in so many ways." Funny, all of the sudden I started to count blessings. "When I am far from you, you are ready to pull me close." I started to notice how blue the sky was and the great greens of the trees. "You care for me and all your children in ways that go unnoticed." OK, time to start noticing ways that God cares for me and for all of us – there are so many. "Thank you for all the ways that you care, more than I can name." A little appreciation goes a

long way. “Lord, I hope to be able to care in just a small portion of the generous and loving ways that you show care.” There is a great deal for me to care about. “Thank you God for this day and renewing my Spirit.” I felt renewed. I said “Thank you” again and added an, “Amen.” I threw in a few moments of silence. My spirit blossomed.

We pay so much attention to our physical bodies, what we eat, drink, wear, our appearance, and our mobility. We don’t spend anywhere close to that time caring for our spiritual selves. Jesus knew the importance of spending time with God everyday to be ready for what he and the disciples had been through and for what the day and days would hold, no matter if it was feeding five thousand, healing crowds, dealing with the Jewish authority, or trying to straighten out the so called issues of squabbling disciples. Jesus knew the importance of being spiritually in shape. It’s a lesson for us all.

There is a poem that Reverend Deborah Spink has shared in this week’s edition of the *Minister’s Annual Manual* that I find applicable to today and for everyday. It goes like this:

I got up early one morning and rushed right into the day;

I had so much to accomplish that I didn’t have time to pray.

Problems just tumbled about me and heavier came each task.

“Why doesn’t God help me?” I wondered. God answered, “You didn’t ask.”

I so wanted to see joy and beauty but the day toiled on gray and bleak.

I wondered why God didn't show me. God answered, "You didn't seek."

I tried to come into God's presence and used all my keys at the lock.

God gently and lovingly chided, "My child you never knocked."

I woke up early this morning and paused before entering the day.

I had so much to accomplish, so certainly I stopped and I took time to pray.

It's not near as official as an announcement from a flight attendant, but still I'll try; hear this announcement from your pastor. Pay attention to your spirituality first then take care of the rest. And yes, God is our pilot and is in exactly the right place. Let us pray.

Holy One,

We do come before you opening ourselves to you and the gift of prayer. Our spirits sag at times. Maybe even at this time. Our souls need refueled. Maybe even right now. You are the life giving, uplifting power of our true purposes. Energize us in

the ways that only you can as we prepare to go out into the world carrying forth your good news of love. Amen.

Offering: The money we share and the time and talents we give helps this faith community offer God's good news. Please give prayerfully and from the heart.

Dedication: Lord, accept and bless this offering given here today and may all the places it is used know more fully of your love and blessing. This we pray, Amen.

Benediction: With Spirits refreshed, renewed, and reenergized by God's unending love, we go forth into the world surrounded by that love – truly the firmest of all foundations. We go forth with our lights shining. Amen and Amen.

Sources:

Holy Bible – New Revised Standard Version; Harper Bibles: San Francisco; 2007.

Jokes about Airplanes – Clean Jokes for a Dirty World; www.basicjokes.com; 2009.

The Minister's Annual Manual; Logos Productions: Inver Grove Heights, MN; 2008.