

“We’ve Got Spirit”

Sermon – May 26, 2024 Stone Presbyterian Church

<cheering> “We’ve got spirit, yes we do. We’ve got spirit, how about you?”

<pause> Yes, that cheer, which I heard at every high school football game, is what came to mind when I read today’s lectionary passages.

Now for the “frozen chosen”, as we Presbyterians call ourselves tongue-in-cheek, you can consider it a rhetorical question. God forbid that we engage emotionally in a worship service. What are we? Pentecostals?

But if this were last week with guest preacher the Rev. LaDana Clark aka LADYJAM, you know it would be a real question! And she would expect an enthusiastic answer—and not a timid raise of the hand.

And though God certainly does not forbid it, fortunately for you, I, too, am a traditional Presbyterian. More’s the pity perhaps.

Today, we begin six months of Ordinary Time. That is, we are in no church season, like Advent, Christmas, Lent, or Easter. To kick that off we celebrate Trinity Sunday, which seems apropos in a way since it centers on a doctrine of the church, rather than an event.

And though for most Sundays we focus on God the Father or God the Son, on Pentecost and Trinity Sundays we typically hit on God the Holy Spirit. While the first two persons, as we say, we can describe with analogies, like the paternalistic attributes of “Father” and “Son” or descriptively as “Creator” and “Redeemer”, we have little on the “Holy Spirit.”

Indeed, “Holy Spirit” implies there is a spirit that is not holy. What then is “spirit”?

As a cheer it means having enthusiasm, energy, engagement!

In a similar vein, if we were to have an exchange on political view, we might have a “spirited” discussion, though perhaps with a somewhat less positive spin.

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If you persevere at an activity despite challenges, someone might say to you, “That’s the spirit!”

That’s a different “spirit” than the drink that results from the process of distillation, which captures the essence—or spirit—of the liquid. That is, the alcohol. Ironically, this may be closer to the “spirit” that is in today’s passages—and Bible in general.

In Hebrew *ruach* (ROO-akh) means wind or breath—or spirit. It can be ambiguous as Genesis starts, “In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” Many translations say a “spirit of God swept over the face of the waters.”

Ruach came to be seen as a life force, which makes sense, since no breath, no life. And from the beginning, people saw that it was God that gave life. So *ruach* was that intangible essence of life.

In Greek *pneuma* was like *ruach* and also meant, breath, wind—and spirit. In English we have derivative words like pneumatic (air driven) and pneumonia (sick breathing).

In Latin the word was *spiritus* where we ultimately get our English word “respire” as in to breathe and, of course, “spirit” with its different meanings as you heard earlier.

Now in ancient Greek thought this material world, including our bodies, were not considered the ultimate reality; that was the spiritual world. Thus, when you died your soul was freed from your body to join the true reality.

As an aside the Greeks—and the Apostle Paul—were not always on the difference (if any) between “spirit” and “soul”. They’re both

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“spiritual” with soul being more the individual and “spirit” more the life force itself.

This dualistic philosophy of material vs spiritual worlds greatly influenced western and Christian thought: body bad, spirit good; this world evil, heaven good.

The problem with this view is that it can lead you to say we are just tolerating this material life while waiting for the spiritual one. Thus, why should we do anything to make life better now?

Because at the end of creation Genesis 1:31 says, “God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.” This material world is God’s world and he gave us the breath of life to live in this world.

Because we are spiritual beings here. Jesus tells Nicodemus and us that we must be born of water and spirit. That is, we must be born again with the spirit that comes from above, that is from God in heaven.

God did so love the world that he gave up his only son but so we might receive the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, that we might live. Not pedestrian lives only looking out for number one but to live a new way of life being filled with the spirit.

Living “according to the flesh”, as Paul writes in today’s passage from Romans, is to live for that which is transient, pursuing self-interests at the expense of others, and ignoring the presence of God

We tend to believe the world is save through redemptive violence. Virtually all our stories and movies are about heroes with the good guy (or gal) destroying the evil one.

Jesus introduced a different way, a way of peace and reconciliation. Jesus’ coming was so important because it introduced a whole different way of life, one that we tend not to take seriously because it involves

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sacrifices, risking oneself for others, and looking weak because we are not fighting back.

As children of a Triune God, we embrace the relational nature of life. For groups and churches that tend toward individualism, it is important to remember that Christian life is not just about one’s private relationship with God, but also about treating one another as beloved members of the same family.

It can also provide reassurance that we are not alone when we suffer. Just as believers are united with Christ in both joy and pain, so too are we called to support each other in all circumstances. Indeed, as Paul later writes in Romans, the Spirit also intercedes for us in our weakness.

God calls us to name and reject the various ways we are confronted with the lie that our identity and self-worth depend on anything other than the Triune God’s self-giving love for us.

Becoming more successful in our careers, acquiring more followers on social media, or working on our physical appearances will not ultimately fulfill us. Such pursuits—while not necessarily bad—can return us to a state of bondage if we let them define how we see ourselves and others. Life in the Spirit frees us from such judgments so that we can love each other with the same love we receive from God.

And for that we should be eternally grateful. Two, four, six, eight, who do we appreciate? God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.