

Arvada
United Methodist Church

30 May 2010 “**Just a little more Spirit**” Rev. Rusty Butler

Scripture: **Isaiah 43: 18-19; John 16:12-15**

A young rabbi found a serious problem in his new congregation. During the Friday service, half the congregation stood for the prayers and half remained seated, and each side shouted at the other, insisting that theirs was the true tradition. Nothing the rabbi said or did moved toward solving the impasse.

Finally, in desperation, the young rabbi sought out the synagogue's 99-year-old founder. He met the old rabbi in the nursing home and poured out his troubles. "So tell me," he pleaded, "was it the tradition for the congregation to stand during the prayers?"

"No," answered the old rabbi.

"Ah," responded the younger man, "then it was the tradition to sit during the prayers?"

"No," answered the old rabbi.

"Well," the young rabbi responded, "what we have is complete chaos! Half the people stand and shout, and the other half sit and scream."

"Ah," said the old man, "*that* was the tradition."

When two or more are gathered, factions lurk in the midst of them.

For example, if I were to talk about the immigration problem, there would be some who would think it's about time. There would be others who would say, "why does he have to talk about that now". If we change the worship times to 8 and 10, there will be some who say, I love 9:30 I don't want to change it and the others would say 10 o'clock is perfect. We're going to get some new sanctuary furniture. Some will say I loved the old sanctuary furniture, and others will say, "what sanctuary furniture?"

Church is funny...and serious all at the same time. It's like politics maybe hilarity abounding until you stop and think about the lives that are touched. Then it gets serious fast. Or like families, looking in from the outside you

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might think oh my they are such a normal family...but if you were on the inside looking out, completely crazy.

In the Old Testament, there are about 150 references that suggest that the people of Israel should “remember.” Usually they are told to remember where they came from and what they had to go through to get to where they were. That is a good piece of advice.

We should remember where we came from and what we had to go through to get where we are. Memorial Day weekend is a day for remembering isn't. Certainly remembering those who died in war trying to make the world a better place, being patriots, and too remembering loved ones who helped to make us who we are.

There is a reason to remember.

But then again there is this text in Isaiah...”Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old.” If you are like me trying to find every inconsistency in the Bible you might say, “So which is it?” Should we remember or not remember? And if we should remember just what is it we are supposed to remember and what is it we are supposed to not remember...If you are not a careful reader of the Bible these things can slip past you. You can flatten the whole thing out like a pancake.

The scholars say that this text from Isaiah is just one of many examples in the Bible of something called counter wisdom. There are other examples of course, the book of Job is a book that counters the traditional wisdom. It questions the conventional wisdom, it says there are no easy pat answers about God and about what happens to us in God's world.

The book of Ecclesiastes is a book of counter wisdom. Vanity of vanities, it's all vanity.

One of the reasons the Bible has staying power, is that it speaks to liberals and conservatives alike, that it can comfort and challenge at the same time is that it doesn't leave out alternative voices, the counter wisdom. That's what makes it compelling. I like what our ancestors in the faith did. They didn't

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leave that counter wisdom stuff out. They could have but then we'd have a much less robust faith story it would be flat like a pancake. And who wants a faith that's flat like a pancake? I hope you don't.

But back to this example in Isaiah. I think the reason the author is saying do not remember the days of old has something to do with the speaker, and when they were speaking...and to who.

That means these things become important. Don't they?

Remember where we came from...God was with us, we can face down whatever comes our way. That's why we remember.

But then Isaiah, who may have felt the people were stuck, couldn't move forward because of being tied to the past thought God is not calling us to keep sticking with the past, God is about doing a new thing. Get ready to get unstuck.

Get ready for the Lord is going to do a new thing. I don't know about you, but I think religion can get stuck. Churches can get stuck, heck, even we can get stuck.

In the gospel of John, let me set up the stage for you. This chapter is smack dab in the middle of what is known as the farewell discourse. Jesus is coming to the final stages and these are the things that John's community remembered about those days.

Jesus says, "I still have many things to say to you but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit comes, the spirit will guide you into the truth of things." I can't give you all the truth now, you couldn't bear it but it will come in the fullness of time. Be ready.

That last part is my paraphrase. But I think it's a good one.

Last week, we celebrated Pentecost with a service in here like nothing quite like we've done before. We had a jazz band and they were good...and during the service I don't know if you saw or felt it or not...but Valerie

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opened up the Bronco doors over here and a gust of wind came shooting through...like the spirit lighting on us. She said afterwards that she'd never experienced worship here like that in the 1 ½ years she's been here.

In the days to come, we're going to see if that kind of spirit won't reappear. Letting us breathe. Be ready God says, I'm about to do a new thing, now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?

In the middle ages, some of the churches were built with holes in the roofs, little windows. They called them Holy Spirit holes. They were holes in the middle of the roofs up near the top which could be opened and on Pentecost Sunday, they'd have people in the church climb up on the roof and at a certain time in the service they'd release white doves into the church to fly around. Doves have always been a symbol of the Holy Spirit you remember that story in the gospel of Mark when the Holy Spirit comes alights on Jesus after his baptism, like a dove it says.

Not only would they release these birds into the sanctuary, we've had a couple of birds in here since I've been here and a bat. But I don't think that's quite the same!

But back then, they'd dump bushels of rose petals down from above through these holy spirit holes. Can you imagine that? Not red balloons going up but red rose petals coming down. Awesome.

The question is whether or not we have Holy Spirit holes in our hearts and minds. Some place that can be opened up and let the fresh wind of a renewed spirit blow through us and carry us to some new place of faith.

I don't know about you, but I yearn for that sometimes. So that when I feel stuck, feel like I'm spinning my wheels, feel like I take one step forward and two steps back I could use the freshening wind of a Holy Spirit come barreling through, or come gusting by and that would be something...that would be something.

I leave you with this poem by Christina Rosseti "Who has seen the wind? Neither I nor you. But when the leaves hang trembling, the wind is passing through. Who has seen the wind? Neither you nor I. But when the leaves bow down their heads, the Wind is passing by."

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Amen.

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