

Sermon for Sunday, May 6, 2018 - "Roots and Wings"

Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 6, 2018
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus. Amen.

So, you know that saying, "There are two gifts we should give our children, one is roots, the other is wings." Such a beautiful saying - it is, of course, much, much easier said than done.

Whatever your experience in your own family, the good news is that God, the ultimate parent, provides us all with roots and wings. We hear about them in our scripture readings today.

We hear about what roots and grounds us - the love of God. We are called to abide in that love, to sink down into it and let it nurture us so that we will bear the fruit of love. We are to be rooted in God's commandments, which shape and form us to be people who love.

We also hear about what gives us wings, what propels us out of the nest, helps us to take risks and enter the unknown - that is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit often appears as a dove, so there are even some actual wings involved. But much more importantly, the Spirit empowers us to face change and uncertainty.

We need both of these things in order to be loving, faithful people in this tumultuous, challenging time.

It's easy to get cozy and lazy as we abide in God's love when really it should propel us outward. We need the spirit to push us out of our comfort zones.

That's what happens for the Apostle Peter in our first reading today. The Spirit pushes him out into relationship with people he thought were wrong and unclean. We heard just a bit of the story today, but it is such an important story that I want to tell you more of it.

So, Peter is a faithful Jew, rooted in the commandments and in Jesus' love. He's bearing fruit - preaching about Jesus' resurrection to other Jews.

But then Peter has a strange vision when he's praying. He sees a sheet coming down from the heavens filled with all the animals that good Jews are commanded not even to touch, much less eat. A voice tells him to kill and eat these animals. He protests; he's never eaten anything profane or unclean! The voice says, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." This happens three times.

Right then, some men show up looking for Peter. They've been sent by a Roman soldier named Cornelius. Cornelius is a person of faith and prayer, but he's a Gentile, not Jewish. Cornelius has also had a vision in which he's been told to send for the Apostle Peter.

The Spirit leads Peter to go with these men.

When Peter arrives, he tells Cornelius and other Gentiles gathered, "You know it's against Jewish law for me to be at your house or even associate with you, but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean." Then Cornelius tells Peter about his vision. Peter is convinced it's the real deal, from God. So, Peter starts preaching to share about this God who gave Cornelius visions.

But, before Peter can finish his sermon, the Holy Spirit is poured out upon everyone gathered - even the Gentiles. Cornelius and the other Gentiles experience joy, connection to God, and the life-giving power of the Spirit.

Peter, wisely, stops preaching and starts baptizing. The Gentiles invite Peter to stay for many days. That is huge - there were major barriers between Jews and Gentiles, centuries of division and hostility. Yet, the Spirit goes ahead of Peter and pushes Peter into a relationship that helps him to learn and grow. He finds that his understanding of what God is doing in the world is too narrow. His heart and mind are opened.

When Peter later explains this to other Jews, it's clear that his roots - in prayer, in Jesus' teachings, the love of God - make it possible for him to follow the Spirit into all of this.

If we are to be loving and faithful in tumultuous and uncertain times, we need to learn from Peter's experience. We need to be grounded in those same ways as individuals and as a congregation. We also need to pay attention to where the Spirit is leading us.

Here at Good Shepherd, as we ground ourselves in love and scripture, we continue to be drawn into relationship with our refugee and immigrant neighbors, especially as division and hostility against them is flamed. Scripture is so clear that God's vision of a just society includes welcoming and advocating for strangers, refugees and immigrants. The Postville Summons event this Friday is another opportunity to do this work.

The Spirit has also led this congregation to be public and explicit about God's welcome of people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer. This congregation has been so richly blessed by articulating that welcome. We are nurtured and led by people of deep faith who are viewed as unclean in other Christian settings. But God has shown us to call no one profane or unclean. We must not harm God's children this way and the church needs the gifts of these beloved people. Let's be even more public about our welcome this Saturday at the Pride Parade.

Here, the Spirit leads each of us as individuals beyond partisan divisions into relationships with people who disagree with us. Those relationships happen here at Good Shepherd. As we love and learn from others here who see things differently, we are more able to do that in the larger world.

The Spirit also leads us back to be more rooted and grounded in prayer so that we can be as open as Peter. Sunday Worship, the upcoming Service of Prayers for Healing, the Spiritual Gifts Workshop, and Fatih5 Potlucks that we'll have this summer are some of the ways we can do this.

As we head into God's future for us here at Good Shepherd, where else will we be led? We need to be grounded in God's love for all people and open to the Spirit's guiding. We need both roots and wings. Thanks be to God that we have been given them.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.

