

## Scripture Reading:

“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” John 3:8

## Sermon

### Introduction:

In 620 King Edwin of Northumbria met with his warriors to decide if his kingdom would become Christian. Northumbria was a region in the country we today call Britain. King Edwin and his people are part of the people the citizens of the Roman Empire called "Barbarians". (When they heard the barbarians speak in their native tongue, it sounded to them like "ba-ba-ba". Thus, they coined the term "Barbarians".)

When the Christians of the Roman Empire considered the possibility of the Barbarians defeating them, they thought it would not only be the end of the Empire, but the end of Christianity. Some of their theologians and leaders even considered the possibility of this event to be a sure sign of the coming of the "end times".

But 200 years after the city of Rome was indeed sacked by the barbarians, one of their number, King Edwin, met with his military leaders and decided to follow Christ. He was baptized, then his leaders and then the citizens of his kingdom.  
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At about the same time, missionaries from the Persian Christian church, centered in Baghdad, walked to Silk Road all the way into China. They presented the Roman Emperor with a translation of portions of the Scriptures which he took to his study to read.

1,400 years ago, in the 7th century, the work of the Spirit brought the good news of Jesus' life, death and resurrection to the Barbarians in Europe at about the same time it was being studied for the first time by the Emperor in China.

"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

This same Spirit is at work amongst us at Silverlake Church today. We are a part of this adventure of following God's Spirit into all sorts of unexpected adventures.

The work of God's Spirit isn't something we have to make happen. It is something that is already happening in our midst. We just have to recognize it for what it is!

Move: The Scripture verse

This passage is part of the gospel of John. One of the themes of John's gospel is developed in the way that Jesus interacts with people. The people come to Jesus thinking in a very down to earth and concrete way. Jesus answers them in a way that is much deeper and more spiritual.

So it is with Nicodemus in chapter 3. Nicodemus is a religious leader in Jesus' day. He comes to Jesus with what seems to be sincerity. He breaks the ice with a comment on Jesus' ministry. But Jesus' responds with by telling him that one needs to be born again to follow Jesus.

Now this term, "born again", has been misused and overused in our day. But in Nicodemus' day it was not so familiar. In fact, in this interaction it seems that Jesus is coining the term.

Nicodemus responds in a very concrete and down to earth way. How is it possible to be born again? Is it possible to get back into the womb again and start over?

But Jesus responds with a very deep and spiritual explanation.

"Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

John 3:5-8

Move: Two Ways of Life

There are two ways of life. One begins when we are born. This life is focused on what some have called karma...on making decisions in life and receiving the consequences of those decisions, whether good or bad. Another way of life is what some have called Grace...which is about receiving a gift of forgiveness and love that comes from outside of our decisions and takes us beyond the consequences of those decisions.

A life of Grace, or of the Spirit, as Jesus calls it in our passage, begins with our

natural life being wrapped up by the life of Grace as when one is wrapped up in the warmth and comfort of a blanket on a cold morning. But then, as this life of the Spirit becomes more and more a part of who we are, the Spirit overrides our natural life, with decisions made according to our own self-interest and begins to guide and direct us according to the love of God.

Such a life, in the eyes of others (and even, at times, to ourselves, is difficult to track. It is difficult to understand. Because the goal is no longer the destination.

The goal is following the Spirit of God in the present moment.

Jesus puts it this way: "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." John 3:8

Move: Following the work of the Spirit

We cannot often map out the work of the Spirit, except in hindsight. The future is not ours to control anymore. But we can listen for the Spirit's guidance in the present moment...in the here and the now.

"The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going."

We are taking time, as a congregation, to listen for the Spirit in our midst. We want to move forward as a congregation according to the life of Grace, according to the life of the Spirit. We have taken two worship services to listen together for the Spirit through Scripture. Some of us have also listened for God as we have read through passages in Acts. I want to continue our discussion by reflecting on three ways the Spirit is moving amongst us.

Move: The Spirit is drawing us together.

Don't take my word for it. The proof is in this room right now.

How many of you started coming to this church in the past two years? (Since 2009)

How many have been here 5 years? (Since 2005)

How many of us have been here 10 years or more? (Since 2000)

This isn't just an accident. It isn't simply the conglomeration of a whole bunch of individual decisions that just happen to find a common center in our worship together. Through all of the demographic and statistical data that might explain this strange phenomenon, we find the Holy Spirit at work...like the wind.

The most interesting question, however, isn't "how" as much as it is "why"? Why are we gathered together here at this time in our lives, at this time in the life of the church? At this time in history?

The Spirit is drawing us together.

Move: The Spirit is forming community among us.

Again, this isn't just a theory I am proposing with we can debate. It is right in front of us this morning.

The Front Door Gathering is one of the ways, at Silverlake Church, that those who have begun coming to our church can take some next steps into our church community. We offer it 2 or 3 times a year, depending upon what the Holy Spirit is doing among us. I always look forward to the FDG. Each time it gathers I get insight into what God is doing in our congregation.

This year the group embodied authentic community. Let me give you two examples:

1) Community: The group was so large that we often divided into groups of 4 people. I had worked hard on questions which the groups could discuss to kind of break the ice with each other and to focus the discussion with each other. But each time in this FDG the groups would just jump right in with each other. Their was a real desire to build relationships with one another, a real desire to become a part of this community of faith. What I was concerned about was not a problem at all!

2) Authentic: This group was incredibly honest and upfront about themselves. People went deep with one another, and there was more than one or two times where things were shared with tears. It was wonderful! We even had different takes on things and this, too, was shared openly and honestly.

One issue that we discussed was membership. For some it was a means by which they could express their desire to go deeper with our church. For others that desire to go deeper was expressed in the ongoing commitment they are making to being in worship, to being involved in other aspects of the church.

Others loved the church but weren't ready to make a commitment to membership for a variety of reasons.

This isn't the first time this issue has come up. And we certainly didn't solve it for everyone. But this group handled it in such a wonderful way that deepened our community together. As a result, some are ready to join as members, others will continue to develop their relationship with this community of faith by building relationships in worship and ministry.

In this group I see the Spirit bringing in an amazing group of people whose commitment to authenticity and community will strengthen authentic community in our church as a whole, and I thank God for them.

Could I have everyone who participated in the FDG and who is here today to stand? (Let's give thanks to God for drawing these people in to help us deepen our community with each other.

The Spirit is forming community among us.

Move: The Spirit is sending us out into the community.

But the question is, "where?" Where is God sending us. It is easy to think of divining the answer like Descartes, sitting in a room and thinking our way to an answer. The idea is that once we get a certain thought in our minds from God we will go out and be on the mission God has given us.

But this sounds a lot like the kind of life we left behind in accepting the grace of God. You see, now that we are living according to the Spirit, God's call doesn't start with us getting a message from God. As people of the Spirit we are caught up in the work of God already. It is just a matter of recognizing what God is already doing in our lives and walking with him.

This means that, in searching for the way God is sending us out into the community we need to look no further than the network of relationships we already have. They have been given to us by God, whether we knew it or not, and our call is to understand that each relationship has been given to us as an opportunity to serve the other with the love of God.

Let's think about the networks of relationships represented here this morning...

1) Let's start with an easy one...where do you get your groceries? (share) This row...just say it out...God is giving you oppots each time you shop to serve others in love.

2) What kind of work do you do? This row...just say what you do...(share) Okay, now, this row...what networks of relationships do they have? God is giving each of you the opportunity to serve those people in love...

3) Thanksgiving...who are you going to be with this thanksgiving? This row...(share). God is giving you opportunity on Thursday to serve those you break bread with this thanksgiving in the love of Christ...start thinking about it and praying about it now...

(By the way, if someone doesn't have a place to go on thanksgiving...please let me know so I can get a place for you...don't be shy...maybe God wants to surprise you with some folks you can serve in love on Thursday!)

Brothers and sisters, I want you to see what an adventure it is to be people who live by the Spirit. God is at work drawing us together, deepening our community with one another and sending us out into these networks of relationships we have in our lives. He is already doing it. Our job is just to join him in the adventure! This truly is the way to live life!

#### Conclusion

“The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.” John 3:8

This activity of the Holy Spirit that we are experiencing at Silverlake Church is going on around the world. This drawing people together, building community among them, and sending them out is something that has been going on in some amazing ways around the world.

In 1900 in Northern America (US and Canada) there were 59,570,000 Christians. In mid-2005 there were 226,685,000. An increase of about 170,000. The beginnings of this story go back to King Edwin among others. King Edwin's decision to become a Christian in Northumberland in 600 ad. is a key chapter in this work of the Spirit.

In 1900 in Asia there were 20,759,000 Christians. In mid-2005 there were 344,838,000 Christians. An increase of over 320,000,000 people. The beginnings of this story go beyond the Chinese emperor's first reading of the Bible in translation, back into the history of the church in Baghdad, Iraq. This work of the Spirit continues as scholars estimate there might be as many as 500,000 Christians in Asia in 2025.

We are a part of this global story right here at Silverlake Community Church. I am so excited to see what God has for the next steps of our adventure. I am so glad that we get to walk into it together as a community of brothers and sisters called together by God and going deeper and deeper in our love and service toward one another.

Amen? Amen