

A New Spirit of Peace**John 14:15-18, 25-27****June 22, 23, 2019****Beargrass Christian Church**

INTRODUCTION.

We are in the midst of a “spirited” summer sermon series.

The season of Pentecost began on June 9 and we took some time to celebrate God’s gift of the Spirit to the Church.

Although Acts 2 describes the Spirit arriving in a dramatic way, there are references to it many years before Pentecost.

For instance, Ezekiel declared that God would put a “new spirit” within us.

Sometimes we think of the gift of the Spirit as one gift.

But I think it is helpful to think of it as a gift of many gifts.

Last week Dr. Lowe talked about a new spirit of gratitude.

In coming weeks we will consider other gifts—hope, freedom, compassion, and growth.

These messages will also complement some other opportunities for us.

Missy Aultman started a new study called “Fresh Encounter: Experiencing God’s Power for Spiritual Awakening.” (Books are available in the office; the group meets Thursdays at 10:30 am.)

And we will offer a “Summer of Spiritual Practices” beginning July 1—an 8-week stretch of daily e-devotions and spiritual exercises.

But today the gift we will consider is a new spirit of peace.

“DO NOT LET YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED.”

For centuries people have turned to John 14 for strength and assurance and peace—and Jesus delivers a remarkable message!

Remember—this is a part of his farewell address, his last words to his disciples.

He knows that they are really upset and concerned and afraid.

So he reiterates the new commandment that he has given his friends and followers—to love others as he has loves them.

He gently clarifies how his presence will remain with them.

Jesus tells them about the imminent arrival of an empowering gift—the “Advocate” or “Helper” or “Counselor”—the Spirit.

But I wonder how they felt...were these words enough?

And as we think about his words, a question naturally arises for us.

WHAT TROUBLES YOUR HEART?

That seems to be an important question for us to consider—individually, as a community of faith, and as members of other communities.

What are the things that rob us of any sense of peace?

What keeps us from an awareness of God’s presence?

Some people will point to the pressure to perform and produce.

Do you remember the Nissan Motors motto—We are Driven!

A friend has that for his email address—his initials—driven.

We are driven—driven to acquire, driven to achieve, driven to be more than we can reasonably be.

And studies indicate that this “driven-ness” is taking its toll—it is making us sick.

A doctor says that he used to think that around 35% of the problems he saw in his office were stress-induced.

Now he thinks it could be as high as 90%.

Problems include ulcers, stomach disorders, headaches, high blood pressure, insomnia, pain, and psychiatric disorders.

Many of us have some of these things—and a number of them are problems of the privileged. He said a lot of folks are suffering emotionally from the CDTs, by which he means the cares, difficulties, and troubles of life.

And at times we make it worse by not talking about them.

We rock along and try to pretend that everything is OK—which makes things worse.

One of church members woke up in the middle of the night and was moved to write down a poem...which is kind of a lament.

This woman is with us most weekends...and we would never know.

But she gave me permission to share her words with you.

In the middle of the night she wrote: "Sometimes I feel alone...I feel invisible...even to my family.

"Death is around the corner or several blocks away.

"I don't mean to be morose or maudlin, but I mourn the things I never really had...like being someone's true love...a partner.

"They expect me to be OK, independent, managing my life.

"I have disappointments...but doesn't everyone?

"I have emotional pain, physical pain, everyday pain—is it alright to have these feelings?

"Is it justifiable...or am I being selfish?

"I hate these tears...my nose stops up...and one really doesn't want to admit to uselessness; it scares and discomforts others.

"So I'll take my daily anti-depressants—and God forbid that someone might feel...guilty...responsible...touched...by my situation."

WHAT TROUBLES YOUR HEART?

Some of us have feelings of guilt from past problems.

A couple spent some time on a vacation in Jamaica.

In the hotel where they were staying there was a map.

In the corner of the map there was some very faint lettering over an almost totally uninhabited part of the island.

The words were: "The Land of Look-Behind."

They asked the owner of the hotel what the words meant.

The owner said that in the days of slavery, runaways from the plantations sometimes escaped into that barren territory.

And they were often pursued by slave owners with dogs.

The fugitives were on the run, looking over their shoulders.

So the term became permanent: "The Land of Look-Behind."

What a terrible place to live—what a terrible way to live—always looking over your shoulder because of something from the past.

But some of us do live there—for a variety of reasons.

Maybe we deeply regret something we did—or didn't do?

Perhaps we have secrets that we don't want anyone to know?

Maybe we're frozen by an inability to forgive—or be forgiven?

I read about a man who had committed a couple of minor crimes.

In fact, they were so minor that no one was looking for him.
 But he walked into the State Patrol office and turned himself in.
 He said: "It felt like a big cancer was just burning me up inside."
 "I just couldn't carry the weight on my shoulders anymore."
 "I lived in a state of perpetual paranoia—every time I saw an officer or heard a noise or a car door slam—I jumped!"

The Land of Look-Behind.

And some of us have tried to run away from God.

In the new Bible study the authors suggest that one of the conditions that plagues us is our chronic tendency to depart from God.

Despite all of God's blessings we tend to wander away.

We are enticed by the world's empty promises and temptations.

Thomas Merton said: "We are not at peace with others because we are not at peace with ourselves—and we are not at peace with ourselves because we are not at peace with God."

WHAT TROUBLES YOUR HEART?

Others would name and claim the fear factor.

Advice columnist Ann Landers received 10,000 letters per month.

She said that most people were afraid of something.

They were afraid of losing their health, their marriage, their job.

They were even afraid when they couldn't name their fears.

Some have faith that something terrible is just about to happen.

It's like the story of the man who heard a noise in the middle of the night.

He went downstairs and encountered a burglar.

He said: "Hey—I'm glad you're here. Come upstairs and meet my wife. She's been expecting you for 20 years!"

And our 24/7 media messages and news feeds urge us to be scared to death and enraged!

There is political mudslinging and madness that never ends...

There is the threat of another unnecessary war...

There is the countdown to more catastrophic climate changes...

Last week Ellen and I were on vacation with our family.

And we didn't listen to any news or read any papers.

And we didn't realize how much better we felt from missing all of the stories—until we got home and back to our routines.

I'm not suggesting that we remain uninformed or uninvolved.

But a healthy balance is needed so we aren't filled to the brim with grim.

Fear is one of the earliest emotions that a baby experiences and most fears tend to be variations of three basic ones—the fear of falling, loud noises, and the fear of being abandoned.

We remembered that last one on vacation last week when we put the triplets down for their first nap in a strange place!

Most of us eventually learn how to deal with the first two.

But the fear of abandonment is a subtle fear which may stay with us for the rest of our lives—it is difficult to be alone.

We feel it when we lose loved ones, when families don't function, when friendships fail, when children are separated...in cities, in suburbs, and at the borders...

What troubles your heart?

WHATEVER IT IS...“DO NOT LET YOUR HEARTS BE TROUBLED.”

These words are still so relevant and remarkable for us today.

One of my favorite preachers and professors is Thomas Long.

He says: “If there is one phrase that best expresses the gospel, one could hardly do better than ‘Do not be afraid.’”

“The gospel is the banishment of fear—not in the sense of some temporal announcement that things are not as bleak as they seem or that tomorrow is a new day—but the revealing of the secret that all that is rests upon the deep eternal peace of God.”

“In the words of Julian of Norwich’s famous declaration of confident hope: ‘All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.’”

This is a strong theme in Jesus’ ministry and farewell address.

“Believe me...do not let your hearts be troubled.”

“Leave the Land of Look-Behind—move on to the Land of Look-Ahead.

“My love, my forgiveness, my grace is sufficient for you.

“Do not be anxious about your life...do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.”

“Be sensitive to the beauty that lies all around you.”

“And believe me...I will never ever leave you alone.”

“You will never be like orphans...I will not abandon you.”

“Peace I leave with you...the peace that is mine...is yours.”

Our experiences with the three wee kings—our triplets—have taught us much and given us great appreciation for medical caregivers.

For instance, in some hospitals there is a constant problem with noise in the nursery—crying babies make other babies cry.

Someone along the way came up with the idea of playing a recording of a mother’s heartbeat beside each bed—and it helped—and it makes sense.

The sound that the baby heard even before it was born—was the sound that comforted it the most after it was born.

Psychiatrists and doctors have described “birth trauma”—which is linked to separation and the fear of being abandoned—of not hearing the heartbeat.

Perhaps that is why Jesus’ words are so poignant and powerful?

Peace prevails when we are connected to our Creator.

As someone said: “Could it be that the Spirit is God’s heartbeat in our lives—the inner assurance that we are not alone?”

So in the midst of our troubles we continue to pray: “Come, Holy Spirit, Come!”

“Pour out on us a new spirit of peace.”