

Spirit Led

a sermon

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John 15:26–27; 16:4b–15

Acts 2:1–21

I have a few dreams that seem to come up in my sleeping fairly often.

There's the dream about driving all over the central US. Somehow, it takes only minutes to travel these great distances, and there's never any traffic.

There's the dream about flying from one country to another and trying to get off this very large, tall airplane with chutes and narrow passageways. (No, I don't get it either.)

There's the dream about needing to finish a particular course in order to graduate, and yet I keep on forgetting to attend class.

And then there's the dream that likewise has me in school. I go to class one day. The sun is shining. The birds are singing. I find my desk in the classroom and engage in friendly banter with my friends. And then one of my friends says, "So, are you ready for the test?"

"Test???!!!!!"

That's when my dream becomes a nightmare, or a nocturnal working out of deep seated feelings of failure and of being perpetually ill-prepared.

Which means, of course, that my dreams, and probably yours as well, often have their origin in real life experiences.

For me, it's often that experience of not feeling ready.



The disciples did not feel ready.

Because when Jesus left his disciples, he didn't leave them with an encyclopedia.

He didn't leave them with his library, full of books with his notes in the margins.

He didn't leave them his journals.

He didn't leave them with Google, or Facebook, or Twitter.

He didn't leave them with computers, or calculators, or even an abacus.

Seriously, now, he didn't leave them with all the answers.

And so they weren't ready for him to go.

There was so much more Jesus could have told them. There was so much more they wanted to hear from him. But he knew they weren't ready — "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now."

No, the disciples weren't ready.

But they would be *made* ready. Jesus was not leaving them on their own. He was leaving them with the Spirit. And the Spirit would lead them. They would be Spirit led.

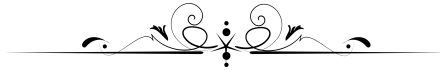


I come across that phrase now and then. “Spirit led.” Some churches see themselves, and describe themselves, as Spirit led. Some congregations want their pastors to be Spirit led, and they seek to hire such pastors. Some people are attracted to churches because they find them to be Spirit led, and they leave churches when they sense an insufficient level of Spirit led-ed-ness.

Some pastors are hired based on how Spirit led they seem to be. Similar judgments also lead to some pastors being fired.

I’m not sure I have ever read or heard a clear statement of what “Spirit led” means to such people.

I suspect I would not agree with their answer.



Jesus left the disciples, and he left them with the Spirit, who would lead them. So, once the Spirit came, they were Spirit led.

This was so needed.

Because the disciples didn’t have all the answers. How could they? Many of the questions had not even been asked yet.

Of course, the disciples were often not the sharpest knives in the drawer. We see this a lot in the gospels. Jesus would clearly show them who he was and what he was about over and over, but they still wouldn’t get it.

The disciples weren’t ready. Not really. By any normal assessment, not at all.

But Jesus would send the Spirit. And the Spirit would lead them.

But *where* would the Spirit lead them? To some place? *From* some place? Up, down, over, out?

Jesus tells them that the Spirit would lead them into the truth. But what does that mean? What did Jesus mean by “the truth”?

Did he mean correct answers to some test?

Did he mean some philosophy, some ideology, some system of right and wrong?

Did he mean some conceptual, rather than physical, destination?

No. What he meant was himself.

The Spirit would lead the disciples into “the truth.” And by “the truth” Jesus meant himself. The Spirit would lead them to truth about Jesus: who he is, what he means. The Spirit would lead them into the truth: into a greater understanding

of who Jesus was,
why he came,
what he does.

The Spirit would lead them into the truth; the spirit would lead them into an understanding of all those things that they should have known but never before then caught on to.

Then, they would be ready, not because of themselves, but because of the Spirit.



Now, speaking of the Holy Spirit is no little thing. After all, the Holy Spirit is the very movement of God.

The Holy Spirit is uncontrollable.

The Holy Spirit is unpredictable.

The Holy Spirit confounds our expectations.

The Holy Spirit disrupts our definitions of “normal.”

Many forget that, or ignore it, or deny it.

So it is that many have spoken ill of the Spirit. They have hijacked the reputation of the Spirit to justify their own actions. They have misrepresented the Holy Spirit to support their own programs. The Holy Spirit has often been mocked, not openly of course, but by being used as support

for the weird and the wacky,
the partisan and the political,
the selfish and the short-sighted.

But that can't be what Jesus means. Jesus says that the Spirit *will not speak on his own*. Jesus says that the Spirit “will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.” The Holy Spirit, the very wisdom of God: this Spirit was with God before the dawn of creation. This Spirit empowered Jesus' ministry. And this Spirit will lead us into the truth, the truth about Jesus:

to Jesus himself.
to what has always been true,
to the fundamental realities.

But this leading is ongoing, and we need it. We need it so much. Because none of us is complete, none of us has arrived, none of us can claim “Oh, I understand it all.” All of us need the Spirit to be leading us to that truth, again and again.

For we forget.

We stumble.

We willingly close our ears to God's call.

Sometimes it's as if we just want to be left alone, so we shut the Spirit outside for awhile so we can sin in peace (or so we think). For numerous reasons, we are always in need of the Spirit's direction, leading us into Christ's future firmly grounded in Christ's past.

Because the Christian life is the Spirit-led life, in which we are led into the truth about Jesus:

the truth that he forgives the sinner;
the truth that he heals the sick;
the truth that he raises the dead.

This is the truth into which the Spirit leads us.

And you know something? *We* are

the sinners who need forgiveness,
the sick who need healing,
the dead who must be raised.

This is the truth into which the Spirit leads us.
And in Jesus Christ, by Jesus Christ, we are also

the sinners who *are* forgiven,
the sick who *are* healed,
those who were dead but are now alive.

This is the truth into which the Spirit leads us.



There's more. Of course there is!

You see, if being Spirit-led means being led into the truth about Jesus, then it means that we are led to the truth about ourselves. Because what we see in Jesus is what we are supposed to be. The Spirit will guide us into understanding Jesus, in whom we may understand ourselves.

That's right. Jesus shows us what it is like to be truly human. Hand in hand with his being truly God is his being truly human. In Jesus, we see true humanity.

Some Christians are uncomfortable with this. I think it's because they are embarrassed by their own humanity, embarrassed by their bodies, embarrassed by their creaturely limitations.

I believe that the Spirit-led life is a life that sees our bodies

not as a curse but as a gift,
not as prisons but as open spaces of freedom,
not as chains but as instruments that sing out the glory of God.

Because to be Spirit led is to be led into the truth of Jesus:

who is God incarnate,
who condescended to us embodied creatures,
who raised up and exalted the embodiment we all share.

The Spirit leads us to into the truth of Jesus in his humanity. And as we are Spirit-led into this truth, we can find this uncomfortable. Because Jesus highlights how we have *not* lived up to his example. In his light, the Spirit highlights the sad reality

of our pettiness,
and bigotry,
and meanness,
and shortsightedness,
our passivity in the face of injustice,
our inaction in the face of cruelty,
our silence in the face slander,
(whether whispered, shouted, or Tweeted) our fear in the face of death,
our embarrassment in the face of unbelief.

In the light of Jesus and compared to the holy demonstration of true humanity he gives us, the Spirit leads us into uncomfortable truths about ourselves.

But the leading of the Spirit also shows us the Christlike possibilities before us, the ways we can live out our human nature that bring glory to Christ and fulfill the promise of creation.

This is the promise, and the potential, the gift and the task of being Spirit led.

Spirit led, we can love the enemy.

Spirit led, we can welcome the stranger.

Spirit led, we can care for the wanderer, the sojourner, the immigrant.

Spirit led, we can feed the hungry.

Spirit led, we can bless those who curse us.

Spirit led, we can reconcile the estranged.

Spirit led, we can declare the good news of Jesus to those who have not heard it.

Spirit led, we can do all this.

Spirit led, we must.

Will we?