

Sermon: "Being Led by the Spirit"
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Olivet Congregational Church, UCC
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SCRIPTURE

Matthew 4: 1-11

⁴ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.' ⁴But he answered, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." '

⁷ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, "He will command his angels concerning you", and "On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone." '

⁷Jesus said to him, 'Again it is written, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test." '

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹and he said to him, 'All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.' ¹⁰Jesus said to him, 'Away with you, Satan! for it is written, "Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him." '

¹¹Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Sermon "Being Led by the Spirit"

I love to blow bubbles. I love to watch them form as the soap solution fills with air and stays connected to itself. I love to watch them come off the wand, forming a circle that wiggles and shimmers as it floats on the wind. I love to watch them as they catch the wind, sometimes flying upward into the tree tops or floating down to nestle on blades of grass.

I recall taking a mini family vacation when my daughters were in high school. We stayed in Rhode Island, in a room that looked out over the ocean, with a balcony that was situated over a walkway with little shops and restaurants below. One morning, as people were walking and getting their coffees, I blew bubbles from the balcony off our room. As they drifted down below, the adults did not seem to notice. But the kids, they were delighted. They would look up, surprised and excited, giggling and wanting more. It's a fond memory for me. You see, bubbles make me smile. Their formation. Their movement. Not knowing where or how far they will go. Somehow bubbles evoke a sense of wonder. While we cannot see the breath that forms them or the wind that moves them, we can see the effects of breath and air on bubbles.

That makes me think of the Spirit. I see the Spirit as a source of wonder. We don't see the Spirit. But we know the Spirit moves among us. We may not know how or where the Spirit will enter our lives, but the Spirit has a way of making things happen.

In Genesis we hear that the wind moved across the void. In Hebrew, the word "ruach" means wind, breath or spirit. So we trust the breath of God, God's spirit, was on the move. God's breath. The Spirit. At Creation. You could not see the Spirit, but she was at work with the Creator and creation was a result. It was and is good. And God is still creating.

Today we hear that the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness, where he fasted for forty days and nights and was tempted by the devil. Later we will hear Jesus' words as he prepared his friends for his death. He told them he would send an Advocate who would continue to teach them. He assured them of his love and offered them his peace. He told them, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Do not be afraid." Jesus knew that

they would face challenges as his followers, so he would send the Spirit to them. He would send the Spirit of Truth to guide them through whatever troubles they would face. And the Spirit showed up. She descended on the disciples at Pentecost; energizing them and giving the courage to proclaim Jesus' message of love.

Throughout scripture, the Spirit is at work. From being present at creation to descending upon Jesus as he came out of the waters of baptism and leading him into the wilderness, to Jesus giving up his spirit as he breathed his last breath on the cross, and the Spirit descending upon the disciples at Pentecost. The Spirit was at work and still is.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul tells the young followers of Jesus about the fruit of the Spirit. He tells them "the fruit of the Spirit is **love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**" (Galatians 5:22-23) In his first letter to the young church in Corinth, Paul tells the Corinthians that there are various gifts but the same Spirit. Those gifts include **wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, working miracles, prophesy, discernment, speaking in tongues and interpreting the speech of tongues.** The Spirit gives these gifts as the Spirit chooses.

We may not see the Spirit, but we can see the Spirit at work. The Spirit is at work around us, within us, and through us. I have seen her at work in this church over the past two years as your pastor, sharing your faith journey. I have seen the fruits and gifts of the Spirit at work. I have seen your **faithfulness** during worship, at Bible study, or book studies, as we shared our **faith** in traditional and new ways. It was a privilege to learn with you and from you, to grow in **wisdom and knowledge.** And we have sung traditional hymns and contemporary Christian music in worship with **joy.** You know, my mother once told me that singing is praying twice. So for being able to pray through song is a blessing.

I have seen **generosity** in this church's outreach – serving meals at St. Georges or providing food for our food pantry or walking in the Crop Walk and filling back packs for children in foster care or hygiene kits for far away neighbors or making gingerbread houses with youth who use our gym. It has been a blessing for me to be able to serve others with you.

I have experienced your **patience** - especially early in my ministry and as we have done Zoom services on Sunday mornings. I have experienced your **kindness** throughout my time here.

I have seen **joy**. It was on your faces when we shared good news at coffee hour, as we resumed pot luck meals or picnics after the pandemic, while assembling backpacks or hygiene kits or gingerbread houses, and enjoying a Yankee swap. I felt your joy when Serenity or Olivia come to church and play in the sanctuary during worship or fellowship hall afterward. You smile lovingly at the children in our midst.

I have seen the **love** you have for one another - reaching out to one another to offer a ride to church or offering support when a beloved individual was ill or had died. I have seen or learned of **healing**, when people in this community prayed for each other or family and friends who were experiencing difficult times. And I am grateful for the **love** that you show one another and have shown me over my time here and especially the love and kind words you have shared with me recently – well wishes and words of encouragement as I transition to retirement.

I have hope for this church. I know the Spirit is with this church, with all of you. Faith, generosity, knowledge, joy, patience, healing, and love—those fruits of the Spirit are alive and well here. So is the Spirit. And I know the Spirit will continue to be with you in your discernment and continue to guide you in the days ahead.

The Spirit was with Jesus in the wilderness, guiding him. Jesus assures us that the Spirit is with us always and that the Spirit offers us his peace. So as we enter our wildernesses, our times of transition, I pray and trust that the love of God, the Spirit of the living God, and the peace of Christ is with us, will reassure us, will lead us and guide us, and will fill us with love and hope.