

June 9, 2019

John 14: 8, 12-17

Rev. Larry Brown - Powell United Methodist Church

“Life is Wild, God is Good”

Kelly and I have friends who live a long way from us. We don't see them very often, but when we do it's as if no time has passed and we just pick things up from where we left off. Have you had that experience with a friend or family member in your life? Maybe there are lots of miles between you and them but the relationship stays strong, no matter what. Technology helps us stay connected, in a way. We can Facetime or Skype, but this isn't what keeps us connected to them. There's something deeper going on here. They know you. You know them. The distance and miles don't make a difference because you carry something of them in you and they carry some part of you in them. When you get together you don't have to restart the relationship because it's never ended. When you get together you pick up from where you left off because the distance of miles can't take away what is always in you about them.

If our relationships depended upon being physically in each other's presence we'd always have to restart things, and think of the crazy challenge that would be. This was on Jesus' mind toward the end of his earthly ministry. He prepared the disciples for the distance that was coming between him and them, and he wanted them to know their relationship with him would continue. By the time we get to the 14th chapter of John's gospel, Jesus is heading to the cross. His death would bring a lasting change to what the disciples experienced with him, so Jesus reminds them that their relationship is not dependent upon his physical presence. As in our relationships with each other, something deeper was going on. Jesus says his followers are in him and he is in them. And if they would ever doubt this, God was sending a Spirit to be with them, a powerful and holy spirit, and this Spirit would help them know he was with them always.

Today we celebrate Pentecost and remember how God's promise to send the Holy Spirit was fulfilled. The church was born. What is the church but a community of those who know Christ is always with them. The Spirit keeps the relationship alive. The Spirit guides us and empowers us to continue the mission of Jesus to offer healing, hope, and love to a hurting world. We don't see Jesus. We can't embrace him or look into his eyes or hear his actual voice, but the Spirit allows us to pick it up from where he left off but to live confidently with the assurance that Christ is with us, and that's for always.

The theme of our Vacation Bible School this year has been “Life is Wild, God is Good.” The lessons are for our kids but we adults need reminded, too. When life is unfair, when we're afraid, when situations change, when we experience loss and grief, the goodness of God never leaves us. We live through the challenges and we are not defeated by them because the Holy Spirit is working in us keeping our relationship with Jesus strong.

When I was 12 years old I had a spiritual crisis. At the time, I didn't know that's what was happening but now I do. Our family was preparing to move and I was sure my world was coming to an end. We were moving far away from the place where I'd gone to school from kindergarten through 6th grade. I only had memories of that house and that neighborhood. All my friends, all my relationships, what I loved to do was in that place and it was soon to be no more. My heart was breaking over this and one day I found myself in the basement of our house, in the midst of the moving boxes, kneeling on the floor and praying in the way a 12 year old boy would do. With tears running down my face, I asked God to help me. I asked for something, anything, that would help me know it was going to be alright. I will never forget what happened next. A feeling came over me that was like a rush of strength mixed with a determined peace. I had the sense that I was wrapped in hope. In my young mind, I didn't have ways to explain it or understand it but what I believe now is that the Holy Spirit washed over me that day. It's the same Spirit that gave birth to the church, the same Spirit that God promises to all of us, the same Spirit that was working through the days of our Vacation Bible School. The Spirit filled my heart that day when I was just a boy and this same Spirit has attended to me many times along the way. This is the Spirit God gives to you. Yes, life is wild sometimes, but the goodness of God and our relationship with Jesus remains strong all of the time.

Last week, when our kids were in Vacation Bible School, preachers and lay members of the United Methodist Church in West Ohio gathered for what is called Annual Conference. One of our guest preachers last week was the bishop of the Congo, Bishop Muyombo. The bishop comes from a place in the world that experiences many challenges. Africa can be wild. His simple message to us was, “Keep the faith.” “No matter what,” Bishop Muyombo said, “Keep the faith.” This is the message our kids have learned and we, who are here today, are reminded of the same. We keep the faith because the Holy Spirit makes it possible. We keep the faith because Jesus promised to always be with us. We keep the faith, because we are called to serve and live for Jesus in all places and in all times. It just may be that in the coming week you will need the Spirit to be with you and an assurance of faith will wash over you. When you experience that hope, be ready to accept the confidence and strength it brings. Life is wild but God is good, and may the Holy Spirit be with you as you live as a follower of Christ.