

Congregational Church of the Messiah

Second Sunday after Easter

April 6, 2008

“Journey Worth Taking”

Acts 1:1-8

Dr. David L. Gray

Every journey has a beginning and an ending.

In creation, God began His journey by expressing incredible creative power and creating human beings to have a special relationship with God. In Jesus Christ, God came to earth filling the form of a human being with God's own Holy Spirit. Through the life, teachings and death of that amazing human being, God revealed more of Himself to humanity than God had ever revealed before. However, that's not the whole journey.

In the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, God completed the part of creation by incarnating His Spirit, which in a human form, walked, talked, and healed here on earth for a time. However, that was not the end of God's creational journey.

After the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ, God deployed His Holy Spirit by sending it back to earth, not limiting it to the single human form of Jesus Christ, but making His Spirit available to every human being who believes and seeks to follow the Will of God.

The inward journey for God was His courage to reveal so much of Himself by becoming one of us.

The inward journey for us begins when we dare to acknowledge that the most important part of our existence is not our physical nature but our spirit, our soul that God has placed within us.

To journey inward means to take time to think about what we really believe and be willing to test our answer to the direct question: “Who is Jesus Christ to me?”

God has given us the gift of life. All of us here have received that gift without asking for it. The dynamical thing is what we choose to do with that gift.

This Christ-centered journey of life is living each day to its fullest. Jesus said He came that we might have life and have it abundantly. (John 10:10) Our inward journey is to be filled with God's Spirit within us so it guides us, leads us to that abundant life of which Jesus spoke.

Journey Worth Taking

In our lives, the paths we take to deepen our spiritual life with God at times may rise to heights of great inspiration and commitment. At other times, our journey may pass through valleys of anxiety and discouragement.

Each Sunday morning as we come together to worship and praise God, we pause to be refreshed by a drink of His cool water for our soul. Then we can look out at an incredible world filled with God's astonishing beauty and balance available for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear.

In our lives, there also will be surprises whether we are ready for them or not. Surprises often come when we are traveling.

Long-time radio host Paul Harvey, told the story of Carl Coleman who was driving to work one morning and bumped fenders with another motorist. Both cars pulled over out of traffic, and the drivers got out to survey the minor damage. The woman driving the other car was very upset.

The accident was her fault, she admitted, and hers was a new car, less than two days from the showroom floor. She dreaded facing her husband.

Mr. Coleman was sympathetic, but he had to pursue the exchange of license and registration data.

She reached into her glove compartment to retrieve the documents in the envelope that her husband had made sure she knew were there for just such a time as this.

When she opened the envelope, on the first paper to tumble out, written in her husband's distinctive hand, were these words: "In case of accident, remember, Honey, it's you I love, not the car."
(More Stories from the Heart, Alice Gray, p. 154)

In your spiritual journey, even when you do not feel in tune with God, remember God loves you for who you are and not just for the works you do.

One reason the church exists is to strengthen our spiritual journey so that when there are tough hills to climb or intellectual challenges that question our faith, we will be able to draw deeply from the spiritual resources of our relationship with a God who says remember it's for you that I raised Jesus from the dead. (See Romans 8:11)

When the disciples faced their darkest hours in this world, they learned God had not deserted them.

The disciples' outward journey expressing a joyful resurrectional faith would never have taken place if first there had not been the inward experience of a risen Lord.

Journey Worth Taking

The Apostle Paul said, “Thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (I Corinthians 15:57)

Our way of giving thanks for this freedom from fear is our outward journey of faith. Until a transformation happens within us we really have little to share that will liberate and free others. You can’t show others a faith you do not have yourself.

As far as communicating the Good News of the Resurrection, “Nothing can happen through us which is not happening to us in a fresh way.”

(Commentator’s Commentary, Lloyd Oglivie, p. 25)

We each have our journey through life and we are able to learn as we go—through other people, through a host of situations, experiences, and books.

After the Resurrection, the disciples’ encounter with the Holy Spirit was qualitatively different. Through this new awareness of the Holy Spirit, the disciples began to look at life in a dramatically different way. For them the coming of Christ’s Spirit into their lives was a life-changing awareness. The disciples never returned to life the way they did before the experience of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

The experience of the Spirit of Jesus in human lives provides a solid base of inner confidence for men and women. That same resurrectional Spirit of God that the disciples experienced comes to us today just as freely and just as powerfully as it did to the early Christians. It comes from the same eternal living, loving God. God’s Spirit comes to us so we might be free from fear.

It comes to us so we might have the same self-giving love revealed to us abundantly in Christ. Through Jesus Christ our heavenly Father has taken away the sting of death.

Sometimes the journey seems long, but it is not over, and the road passes on through the long afternoon and stretches away into the night.

One of the promises of God that means the most to me is in the last verse of the first chapter of Acts that was read this morning: “The Holy Spirit will come upon you and give you power.” (Acts 1:8a)

That promise goes along with the scripture where Jesus assured his disciples that He will be with them always—not just for a few days or weeks, not just when the path is level and the going is easy, but also when the road is steep and the daily routine is difficult.

Motivation to turn to the Holy Spirit often comes when things are not going well, the tough times when we have failed and we feel God is a distant God, and we are left to face trials and rejection alone.

Journey Worth Taking

The prophet Jeremiah understood God to say, “If with all your heart ye truly seek Me, ye shall ever surely find Me.” (Jeremiah 29:13)

If you love God with only part of our mind then surely there will be misunderstandings between God and you. If you love God with only some of your emotion, then surely there will be times when you will not put God first in thought or action. The indwelling of the fullness of God’s Spirit allows you to be the best you can be. You are free to live a dynamic faith. The fullness of God’s living Spirit touches the lives of those you meet. Having our lives be an expression of the Spirit of God within us is what is required of us. When we allow the Holy Spirit to lead us, there is no limit to what we can accomplish for God.

Easter has passed, but the joy of the Resurrection continues. As people with a resurrectional faith, let us seek first to continually renew our personal experience of the indwelling of the Spirit of God, and then eagerly seek outward expression of the joy and increased energy it gives us.

May our journey through the rest of our lives be filled with the love and power of God, the spirit of the Risen Christ and the joy of those who join us on our journey inward to God’s Spirit and outward in service to others.

Amen.