

# Scripture Readings and Sermon

May 9, 2021 by Rev. Mark Brechin

## **Commentary on Acts 10:44-48** (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

After Peter preaches to "Cornelius, a centurion," the Holy Spirit fell upon them. Like the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, this anointing changes the course of the early church. At Pentecost, God's blessing was no longer restricted to the sacrificial system of the Temple but given to all the Jewish people who believed in Jesus Christ. In this story of Acts, the limitation of God's blessing, considered reserved for the "chosen people", was given to uncircumcised Gentiles. Not only was the Spirit given by God to "outsiders" but it was not preceded by outward repentance or baptism. Peter's action of baptism follows the action of the Holy Spirit. This story comes after Saul's conversion to Paul when God redeems one who was labeled an enemy of the early church. The message of Acts is clear, it is God and not church doctrines or interpretations who judges the hearts of people. It is God who redeems and not a formula or sacrament that redeems. It is belief in Jesus Christ and not simply the name "Jesus Christ" that holds power.

Acts 10:47 "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?"

- What does repentance mean? Is it turning back to God or turning back to community?
- How did the Jewish officials react when Jesus emphasized God over community?
- If it is turning back to God, is baptism necessary if one has received the Spirit?
- Does God's baptism (Spirit) trump community baptism (water)?
- How does this challenge your understanding of baptism and repentance?

## **Commentary on John 15:9-17** (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

Among the most frequently quoted passages from John is 15:12-13, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." The verses around this passage redefine both of the words "love" and "friend". In Greek, there are four types of love: storge - parental love; eros - physical/marital love; philia - sibling or friends love; and agape - unconditional/divine love. When Peter meets Jesus on the shore and Jesus asks if Peter loves Jesus and Peter says "I love you", Jesus is using the word agape and Peter is using the word philia. In this passage, Jesus makes it clear that we are called to agape. We are to abide in unconditional love and give unconditional love. If we love Jesus as a friend (philia), we are to obey him and move beyond conditional love to the unconditional love of agape. Agape love is willing to go to the cross. Agape love follows the Father's will unconditionally because it believes that Father's love is unconditional. Our joy becomes complete when we remove our "conditions". Jesus' love is not predicated on our love for him but loves us unconditionally for he "chose" us. Agape does not mean we are slaves to love but rather we are filled with love and produce the fruit of love that will last. For, John we find freedom when we begin to love unconditionally.

John 15:9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

- What does it mean to "abide" in Jesus' love?
- How do we abide in the love of a family, parent, or spouse?
- Think of a loving memory. What did abiding look and feel like?
- Have you ever felt that way with Jesus?
- What spiritual practices could you begin to nurture that experience of abiding in love?

## **Commentary on 1 John 5:1-6** (*Youtube [Lectionary Study Video](#)*)

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he says "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3) and according to John, to be born from above is to be "born of the Spirit" (John 3:5-8). It is within this context that 1 John says, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God". It is the Holy Spirit, given to us through grace, that allows us to proclaim our faith and Jesus. The new birth through the Holy Spirit not only give us faith but, for John, manifests that faith in love. If God is love and the Holy Spirit was given through Jesus, God's gift of love, then the faith is active in love. John has already argued that the sum of the commandments is love and therefore to obey his commandments is to love. The world, in John's view, is characterized by fear and hate which is the result of sin or, more simply, put the absence of God's love in our life. God's love, however, casts out fear and replaces hatred with truth and compassion. Since faith is the manifestation of God's loving Spirit in our lives, faith conquers the world's fear and hatred through love. Faith is the victory that conquers the world because faith in Jesus is the witness of the Holy Spirit in our lives through love. The Holy Spirit, for John, not only washes us of fear like water but becomes Jesus's blood, the source of life, which replaces hatred with love.

1 John 5:4 ...this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith.

Where is the source of power and strength in this statement?

If the victory belongs to God in Christ, then what work is required of us?

What does a child's faith in their parent look like?

How does faith transform obedience from an obligation to an act of love?

How can we be more child like in our faith and obedience?

### Sermon "**Finding Balance**" (*Sermon Video*)

At times, life can seem like a juggling acts. Just when you think you have a rhythm, life throws in another ball. There have been moments when I feel like those Chinese plate spinners running from one plate to another trying to make sure none of them fall. The stress we place on ourselves can at times bring us to the breaking point.

Finding a balance between our emotional life, our physical life, and our mental life can be difficult. There were days after spending long hours in a cubicle or programming a computer system that physical labor relieved the built up stress. There are other times that we need to stop what we are doing and be emotionally present to those around us. Without a firm center, the war between our heads, our hands, and our hearts can feel like juggling too many balls with too few hands.

There is a fourth aspect of our lives that we neglect but can provide balance to all the areas of our lives: our soul. When our soul is centered upon God, we find that it reorients our entire life. For that deep centeredness we find a well of love that opens our eyes to times when we need to be emotionally present and times when we need to stop and think. That love calls us to action as well as cautiously restrains us.

When we love as Jesus loves us (not 'loved' because Jesus is still alive and loving us right now), we are given the gift of discernment from the Holy Spirit. This anointing of the Spirit that Peter found at the home of a Gentile is given by God to us so that we might live life abundantly and not fragmented and broken by stress. The Holy Spirit shows us what balls we need to juggle and which ones are stumbling blocks to love. Finding a balance between work and family, community and privacy, activity and waiting can be found by being grounding in one's soul. It is from our spiritual relationship with God that we find peace in our worldly relationships.

The world will always demand our attention and, like a spoiled child, will always want us to make it our number one priority. If we are not grounded, we will lose that battle and find ourselves unbalanced and chasing after the world. When we find our balance in our living relationship with God, than we will be victorious over the world's many petty demands. By faith, we find that God's love is greater than the world and the Holy Spirit is wiser than any human guru or self-help coach. With our

soul's centered in love, balance is restored to our heads, our hands, and our hearts.