

“What We Have is Enough!”

Pentecost A: Acts 2:1-21, Exodus 35:30-36:7

May 11, 2008

Oakland Ave. Presbyterian Church

Laura Smith Conrad

Background

Exodus 25:8 “The People must make a sacred Tent for me, so that I can live among them.”

Exodus 29:44-45, *“I will make the Tent and the altar holy, and I will set Aaron and his sons apart to serve me as priests. I will live among my people of Israel, and I will be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God who brought them, out of Egypt so that I could live among them. I am the Lord their God.”*

Introduction of the Scripture:

You may have noticed that we usually read the Old Testament Scripture first, but today we are reading it last. The Exodus passage we will read is to be understood in context of Pentecost.

{Pentecost Trivia: Ask Anna Echols about her given middle name “Pentecost” sometime.}

Pentecost is the Sunday that the church celebrates its birth – the day the Spirit of God descended upon the people and inspired them to be the living, breathing Body of Christ in the world – God’s church. Now this is not the first time the Holy Spirit shows up in Scripture. The Spirit hovered over the waters of Creation in the very beginning and descended upon Jesus in the Wilderness as he was baptized with water and the Spirit. The Old Testament story is Exodus’ version of Pentecost, in a way, when God’s Holy Spirit came to dwell with the children of Israel.

The Exodus Scripture takes us back to the Hebrew people who had escaped from Pharaoh, slavery, and Egypt. They have been in the wilderness. Moses has received the Ten Commandments. But you may remember that when they become impatient and anxious because Moses was taking too long on the mountain, they built a golden calf to worship. God understood that they needed to know of his presence so God directed the people to build a tabernacle. The tabernacle, in effect, was a traveling sanctuary, built so that the Hebrew people knew that the God who brought them out of Egypt would accompany them on the journey. So they begin to build the tabernacle. The LORD chooses some servants to build the tabernacle and the people offer the materials and supplies.

Read Exodus 35:30 - 36:7

³⁰Then Moses said to the Israelites: See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; ³¹he has filled him with divine spirit (The Message says the Spirit of God), with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, ³²to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, ³³in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. ³⁴And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. ³⁵God has filled them with skill to do every kind of work done by an artisan or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of artisan or skilled designer.

³⁶ *Bezalel and Oholiab* (These guys did not make the Baby Name book, but expectant parents may want to consider them after today!) *and every skillful one to whom the Lord*

has given skill and understanding to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the Lord has commanded. ²Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful one to whom the Lord had given skill, everyone whose heart was stirred to come to do the work; ³and they received from Moses all the freewill offerings that the Israelites had brought for doing the work on the sanctuary. They still kept bringing him freewill offerings every morning, ⁴so that all the artisans who were doing every sort of task on the sanctuary came, each from the task being performed, ⁵and said to Moses, “The people are bringing much more than enough for doing the work that the Lord has commanded us to do.”⁶So Moses gave command, and word was proclaimed throughout the camp: “No man or woman is to make anything else as an offering for the sanctuary.” So the people were restrained from bringing; ⁷for what they had already brought was more than enough to do all the work.

Prayer: Breathe on us your Holy Spirit this day, LORD, that words we declare and our response to your Holy Scripture may be pleasing in your sight. Amen.

Sermon:

See if you can figure out which American Movie classic I refer to when I say this:
“There’s no place like home. There’s no place like home.”

Or sing with me, “Follow the yellow brick road……”

You guessed it The Wizard of Oz. In this classic, Dorothy, the Tin man, the Scarecrow, and the Lion are on a journey to find their deepest desires. All four strangers become friends in their quest to find something they are missing. Remember the first character Dorothy meets along the yellow brick road is the Scarecrow who wishes for a BRAIN. Then they meet up with Tim Man who is lacking a HEART. And finally in the dark forest they meet up with the cowardly Lion who lacks COURAGE. And of course, Dorothy is longing to go back HOME. Her house is taken up in a Kansas tornado and lands in this magical Land of Oz. They have heard of the wonderful Wizard of Oz who can grant to them their heart’s desires.

This story is one that begins with a violent storm, confusion, and complete chaos. This is likely how that first Pentecost was. Winds blowing and loud noises mark the coming of God’s Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Language was confused and yet the people understood each other. Pentecost is called the Birthday of the church because it begins a new phase for God’s people – communities of believers who live in a different way as followers of Jesus, the Messiah. Literally, the Holy Spirit blew the doors off and a new community of believers was created – our ancestors in the faith. The Holy Spirit still guides, inspires and directs God’s people on our journey down the road, not the yellow brick road, but our pilgrimage of faith.

Our Old Testament Scripture takes us back to another journey the People of God took once. I think it may be similar to where we are as well. Consider how this story may be like your own or our own at Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church. As I said before reading the Exodus passage, the Hebrew people are wandering in the desert, and God in God’s wisdom commands them to build a Tabernacle or as another version says, the Tent of God’s Presence. You see, the people were getting tired of wandering around and were perhaps questioning whether God was really with them in the process. They experienced the feelings that folks on a long trip experience: impatience, anxiety, feeling lost at times, and looking forward to getting there.

Do you see any connections to your own journey? Maybe you have felt lost, without direction, anxious and impatient. Or maybe you have felt excited to be on the way somewhere, looking forward to what awaits you, and waiting to see what God has in store for you. I think we can say the same thing as a church in our current phase of our journey. We are in transition. We have three interim positions: the youth director, church business administrator, and the interim pastor. A couple of those folks are part-time where we have had [in the past] more full-time staff.

We have new directives from our Mission and Vision goals. We are trying to evaluate the old and keep what is dear and essential to who we are. At the same time, we are growing toward a new vision that has been discerned by our congregation. Our committees are working overtime. Some of us feel lost, without direction, anxious and impatient.

Some of us feel excited to be on the way somewhere, looking forward to what awaits us, and waiting to see what God has in store for us.

Some of us feel both ways at different times!

I think God's people in Exodus would know exactly how we feel. When they felt without leadership, when Moses was taking so long on the mountain, they became anxious and built a golden calf. They forgot how to be faithful to God's covenant. They got tired and wanted to go back into slavery, to Egypt even – at least they knew what to expect there. They got tired of what felt like wandering to them, when God had a purpose for their journey. Perhaps God was teaching them to trust in God's faithfulness to them. I have wondered about that. I think God was teaching them to trust in God's faithfulness to them. Have you seen the t-shirt or bumper sticker that reads: *"Not all who wander are lost"*? Perhaps those folks learned something about trusting the process – trusting that they are on a meaningful journey.

Chuck and I laugh because when we go on trips, our son, Avery, will inevitably ask, "Mom, Dad, do you know where you are going?" Ever since he could talk he has asked us that question on trips. I guess Avery doesn't have much confidence in our navigational skills. I think when you are driving the car or navigating and helping to make decisions, you are comfortable with going along on the journey. When you are the kid in the car seat with no input or map to consider, it is a bit disconcerting to not know where you are and where you are going. Avery is like the children of Israel. Instead of worshiping a golden calf, he is eating goldfish crackers for comfort while longing to go home. At least there he knows what to expect where it is more familiar. And much like the children of Israel, God is leading us on a journey of faith not just crossing geography.

Do you remember what happened to the characters in the Wizard of Oz?

They were all trying to get to the Wizard to give them something they were lacking...something they were missing...home, a brain, a heart, courage. All along the way they were focused on what they were lacking. They each felt like what they were lacking was beyond them. What they need would be in the Emerald city or *Somewhere over the Rainbow*.

I think people (including me) do that, too. We focus on what is lacking. If I only had more time, more money, more training, more stuff, more friends.

Or as a church we sometimes say, “If only we had more programs, more volunteers, more staff, more money to fix the building, more money to give away, more money to hire more people, more this, more that.”

We focus on what is lacking.

I think that is why the Spirit spoke to me through this Scripture of the Hebrew people. It is not a scheduled lectionary text, it simply made itself at home in me and wouldn't leave – like an uninvited guest one learns to enjoy having around. It is a parable for me, for you, and for the church of Jesus Christ even here at Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church. God plans to have the people build a Tabernacle. Scripture says in Exodus 29:44-45, “I will make the Tent and the altar holy, and I will set Aaron and his sons apart to serve me as priests. I will live among my people of Israel, and I will be their God. They will know that I am the Lord their God who brought them, out of Egypt so that I could live among them. I am the Lord their God.” God will live with them wherever they go. They will know that God is with them and they do not have to be anxious or afraid.

God chooses Bezalel and Oholiab – now that's a pair, to head up the building project. Bezalel and Oholiab are called by God because of their particular gifts and abilities. Scripture says, God has filled them with the Spirit of God and given them skill, intelligence, and knowledge or understanding, and inspired them to teach others.

Is that not a Pentecost story? God gifts God's people for the work to which they are called. Not only were Bezalel and Oholiab chosen but also, “...every skillful one to whom the Lord has given skill and understanding to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the Lord has commanded.”

The circle is enlarging from Bezalel and Oholiab to every skillful one to whom the Lord has given skill. But beyond those who were given skills, intelligence and understanding for the task, God also provided what they needed to work with – raw materials. Scripture says that, “Moses then called Bezalel and Oholiab and every skillful one to whom the Lord had given skill, everyone whose heart was stirred to come to do the work (Exodus 36:2).”

Not only the Bezalel and Oholiab called, along with every skillful one, but also **EVERYONE WHOSE HEART WAS STIRRED** to come and do the work.

Imagine what Oakland Avenue Presbyterian Church can do when leaders, people with skills, and everyone whose heart is stirred would come and do the work of ministry for Christ's sake.

The Spirit was working to stir the hearts of the people to do God's work. The people brought freewill offerings every morning to accomplish the task. And the real miracle of the whole story is that they had enough even to the point of too much. Moses had to tell the people to stop bringing their offerings because it was **enough and more than enough!!!!**

WOW. When we are focused on what is lacking we bring nothing to the table. When we see what we have and offer it for God's purposes, we can accomplish much. Much like the scene in the Wizard of Oz, Dorothy and friends finally make it to see the Wizard. When the Wizard's cover is blown, he tells Dorothy and friends that they had what they thought was missing all along. They had what they needed all along.

The Scarecrow has a brain, he simply needed a diploma. The Lion was confusing courage with wisdom and receives a medal. The Tin Man is given testimonial and a ticking heart because the wizard says that we are judged by how much we are loved by others. And Dorothy, of course, gets to go home by clicking her heels. When the Scarecrow asks Glinda why she did not tell them before that Dorothy had the ability to go home, Glinda tells Dorothy that she always had the power – the power to go home, but Dorothy would not have believed her. She had to learn for herself. She had to learn it for herself.

Maybe we do not recognize what we have until we journey through transition with a few friends learning to trust in God and listening to God's Spirit. We have to learn some things for ourselves.

The Hebrew people had to learn for themselves on their journey that they had what they needed all along. They had the Spirit of the Living God, and they had been given the resources of skill, intelligence, and understanding, to do what they were called to do. But the key ingredient was hearts that were stirred to offer what they had all along!

May we all follow their lead!

May your heart and mine be stirred to offer what we ourselves and our resources
...to build up the Body of Christ in this world for God's sake
...knowing that we are called to journey together, not alone
...and the Spirit of the Living God goes with us.

PRAYER:

Sing "Spirit of the Living God"

Spirit of the living God, fall a-fresh on me.
Spirit of the living God, fall a-fresh on me.
Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me.
Spirit of the living God, fall a-fresh on me