

Message for World Fellowship Sunday, January 28, 2018

Glenn Heights Mennonite Church

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Scripture passages: Joel 2:28-29, Acts 1:8 and 1 Corinthians 12:13

Transforming Spirit

Today we celebrate World Fellowship Sunday along with our Anabaptist and Mennonite brothers and sisters in faith around the world. World Fellowship Sunday is always celebrated on a Sunday close to January 21. On that date in 1525, the first Anabaptist baptism took place in Zurich, Switzerland. Cesar Garcia, General Secretary of Mennonite World Conference, offers us an invitation. He writes: “World Fellowship Sunday is an opportunity to remind our communities of faith that we are all part of one body made up of many tribes, languages and nations. It is an invitation to visibly proclaim that now there is no discrimination among us on the basis of race, social status or gender. It is a special day on which to show that we are living a new life in a new society where we mutually support one another, carry those who suffer, serve the world and interdependently learn from one another what it means to follow Jesus. On this day, we celebrate that, in Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, the cultural and national boundaries that separate us have been overcome by the cross.”

Our sisters and brothers in Kenya were the ones who selected the theme – “Transforming Spirit” – and the three short scripture passages that John read for us from Joel, Acts and 1 Corinthians. Throughout the history of the Christian church, followers of Jesus have been transformed and renewed by the living presence of the Holy Spirit, they say. The Anabaptist renewal movement of the 1500s was deeply shaped by the Spirit. Today, the churches in the Global South are especially attentive to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It is because of the work of the Holy Spirit that we as

Christians – in Africa and all over the world – persevere with hope in the face of overwhelming challenges.

What do we learn about the Holy Spirit in the scripture passages which were selected? We see that everyone – young and old, men and women, even those who are oppressed and enslaved – is included. I will pour out my spirit on everyone, God says through the prophet Joel. Everyone will see visions and dream dreams. Everyone receives and is transformed by God’s Spirit.

In the verse from Acts, we see that those Spirit-inspired visions and dreams compel us outward to the ends of the earth. There is nowhere that is beyond reach. This of course includes our own communities and neighborhoods. The Spirit sends us to those far away and those who are across the street. Through the Spirit God gives us the power to reach out on God’s behalf to those who are lonely, hurting and in need of hope.

The verse from 1 Corinthians reminds us that the Spirit claims *all* of us and transforms us into something new. In the Spirit we who are so very different from each other are made into one. One body. With one source of sustenance and inspiration. We are in this together with the help of the Holy Spirit. That is our hope and our strength.

This is the message of Ndbele and Zulu proverbs shared by our sisters and brothers in Southern Africa. Some of us are familiar the UBUNTU paradigm that says, ‘Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’. In essence, “A person is a person because of other people.” Ubuntu makes us love, respect, honor, recognize and acknowledge the dignity of other people. This then makes us a unified whole. We should not discriminate. We are one!

Here’s another one: “Ikhotha eyikhothayo.” The cow licks the one that licks it. A

cow cannot lick its own back to shoo off troublesome insects or to remove dirt. It needs another cow. And along the same line: “Izandla ziyagezana.” Hands wash each other. One hand cannot wash itself adequately. It needs another to help it become clean. You get the drift. We need each other. We’re in this together. And, thank God, through the Holy Spirit we are made one.

Today we remember our living connection to brothers and sisters in Christ around the world as we go about our life as a worshiping community here at Glennon Heights. As we accept Holly and Tyler into membership this morning, we are aware that though they join this particular congregation, they and we are also part of something much bigger. As we receive Communion, sharing the bread and the juice together, we will remember that we do this along with our sister congregations around the world, proclaiming Jesus’ death and resurrection and celebrating our new shared covenant with God. As we bless Joel on his birthday we will think of all the little children in every country and place who are also being held and blessed by their congregations. And as we eat our lunch before the business meeting, we will share our resources – the cost of one lunch each – with our global community. Through the Holy Spirit, we have been transformed, we have been made one.

We will not allow our sisters and brothers in Christ to be disrespected and dismissed. We will not be held hostage by fear of the other. We will not live lives focused on self-protection. For we know that we need each other. There are many gifts to be shared. We are all stronger – our world is stronger and safer – when we work together. We become who we are meant to be when we are in relationship to God and each other. By the power of the Holy Spirit this is made possible. If you believe and I

believe and we together pray, the Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free.

On this World Fellowship Sunday listen to the wisdom of our African brothers and sisters. Let it sink in. They know of what they speak. Amen.