

## feeding . . . gathering . . . carrying . . . leading . (Isaiah 40:11)

March 9, 2010

Dear Family,

Well, if you've been at COSC for at least a month you know that we have several teaching series going on simultaneously. Stuart has been preaching a powerful series on asking, while Bo has been preaching a series from 1 John. These series are punctuated with our once-per-month communion series, where we have regular "everybodies" in our congregation bring a meditation on whatever God has laid on their hearts. Then, in homegroups we are studying 1 Thessalonians, collectively giving us a very rich diet of biblical exhortation.

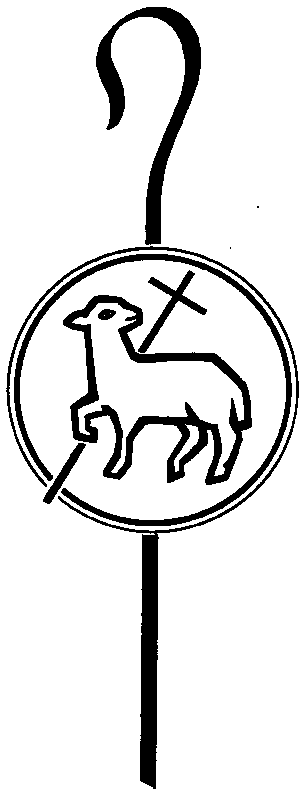
Now, if you've been with us for 6 months to a year you might have pieced together that I've also got a little series going centering on two aspects of our faith: thinking rightly about God and the dynamic tension between his transcendent majesty and his awesome intimacy; and living rightly before God and the importance of what I call "kingdom integrity", the seamless integration of the natural and supernatural aspects of our faith, with our character (fruits of the Spirit and Beatitudes) acting fully in concert with His power (gifts of the Holy Spirit). Last Sunday I continued this series with "Kingdom Power: the Holy Spirit, and the everyday, everybodies of scripture". The central message is the inclusive, participatory nature of life in the kingdom of God. Living as a Christian is not just about surviving the work week, for the most

part overcome by worldly, earthly, and fleshly challenges and limping into homegroup or church for a battery recharge. As I discussed extensively in my last sermon, life is hard but God is good. But despite the hardness and suffering of this mortal life, God means, and has provided for through the person of the Holy Spirit, for our lives in his present kingdom to be exciting and joyful and filled with epic wonder.

This links directly with both Stuart's theme wherein the power of asking in our lives is a direct function of the intimacy of our relationship with God, and Bo's series on 1 John wherein we learn that a relationship with the Holy Spirit is one of John's markers for knowing that we have relationship with God. In 1 John the key verses are 3:24b "And this is how we know that he lives in us: we know it by the Spirit he gave us" and 4:13 "We know that we live in him and he is us, because he has given us of his Spirit." John does not elaborate on what that looks or feels like, but it must be something experiential or else it would not give us any assurance of God's presence or power in our lives. Surely one area of experiencing the Spirit in our lives would be the way that he directs us and empowers us in ministering out of love to others. This is what we see in the book of Acts. It is greatly encouraging to our assurance of our relationship with God when we experience Him working supernaturally through our lives, and supernaturally in our interactions with, and ministry to others. After all, that is what spiritual gifts are all about. In fact it can be pretty daunting and discouraging to try and minister to others without a trust in and experience of this element of supernatural help. Thus, the key element of Sunday's message is that this life, this naturally supernatural adventure with the Holy Spirit, is not just for spiritual superstars. It's for everyday, everybodies like you and I, and scripture is filled with examples of regular guys and gals who experienced that life.

I am grateful to the Luke Sunukjian Thespian Company who helped me illustrate this. The first vignette was about the pre-Pentecost appointment of Matthias as Judas's replacement (Acts 1). The process seems to have been a fairly committee-like, non-spirit-led discussion of how to fill the empty slot. In fact in Acts 1:21-26 we discover the fairly pathetic criteria that was applied: (i) the person had to be with them when Jesus was going in and out after the resurrection, and (ii) the person had to win at drawing straws. They did pray at least and ask God to direct this little game of chance, but truthfully whoever got the job didn't have to do much to be an improvement over his predecessor!

In contrast, the post-Pentecost choosing of the seven in Acts 6 is an illustration of what could and should be ex-



pected of spirit-filled life in the Kingdom. First, the setting was wholly different. Instead of being holed up in hiding as they were in Acts 1, the apostles were, day by day, in the temple courts and from house-to-house, continuously teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ. The number of disciples was increasing, and there was some complaining going on, so they needed more workers. Yes they were selecting what some have called the first “deacons”, and yes they were supposed to wait on tables, but we later find out it was for much, much more. This time the criterion was very different from what happened before Pentecost: “choose seven men who are full of the Spirit and wisdom”. Note that the apostles did not appoint, but instead asked the congregation to choose seven men based on evidence of spiritual power and maturity.

So they start looking amongst themselves for men who fit this new criterion. What then is the evidence that someone is “full of the Holy Spirit” and wisdom? I suggested that they were looking for men whose character exemplified both the Beatitudes and the Fruits of the Holy Spirit: evidence of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, hope, grace, mercy, forgiveness, servanthood, purity, wisdom, generosity, trustworthiness, righteousness, integrity, courage, honesty, humility, compassion, steadfastness, and holiness. And then of course all of these character traits coupled with supernaturally powerful gifts of wisdom, knowledge, teaching, faith, healing miracles, prophesy, discerning of spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, helping, giving, encouraging, evangelizing, pastoring, showing mercy and governing.

Apparently in their midst there were some regular, everyday, everybodies, who demonstrated such character and spiritual power, and I argued that we have such men and women in our midst, right here in COSC today. I further argued that it would be the Lord’s desire that every single one of us would fulfill these criterion. They chose seven regular guys: Stephen, Philip, Procarus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas. The congregation presented these men to the Apostles, who laid their hands on them and anointed, not appointed them! What was the result? “So, the word of God spread, the number of disciples increased rapidly, and even a large number of priests became believers” (Acts 6:7).

What can we glean from what we know about these regular guys? Remember, they hadn’t been bequeathed with sainthood yet!

Here’s what we know about Stephen: he was not an apostle but a regular guy who was full of God’s grace and power. He does great wonders and miraculous signs among the people. No-one could stand up against his wisdom or the Spirit by whom he spoke. He was a great story teller of historical non-fiction. He was fearless in telling the truth despite how painful it was to the hearers and how dangerous it was to him. He saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He was forgiving, even of his murderers. And, he might of have looked right at Saul as he was dying.

Saul now starts going “house-to-house” but to persecute and drag off men and women and put them in prison. Disciples are scattered, including Philip, one of the seven. Phil is just a regular guy, not an apostle, but apparently a disciple who was “full of the Spirit and of wisdom”. So, regular guy Philip goes to Samaria and starts talking about Jesus. Crowds gathered and they paid close attention to Philip because he was doing miraculous signs. People were being delivered from evil spirits who were coming out with shrieks, and many people were being healed. I’ll bet that Philip was more surprised than anyone! He’s got to be thinking, “how cool is this Holy Spirit stuff!” And there was great joy in Samaria then (Acts 8:7).

So one day, as regular guy Philip is walking around Samaria, he hears a voice tell him to go do something crazy; to “walk from Samaria to Jerusalem (a distance of at least 20 miles) in order to get on the South Road, (a road that stretches 50 miles from Jerusalem to Gaza). No explanation is given, nor even any hints about why or what for. All we know is “So he started out”. He was not a spiritual superstar; he just listened, and obeyed. So regular guy Philip is traveling south and he comes up behind a very strange scene. Also traveling south, but at the moment sitting in a chariot reading, is an Ethiopian eunuch. Just as regular guy Philip is coming close to passing the chariot, the Holy Spirit speaks to him again: “go stand by that chariot”. Huh? Stand by it to do what? How awkward is that? But once again he listens to this “word of knowledge” and obeys. The Ethiopian accepts the truth that Jesus was in fact the sheep led to the slaughter of Isaiah 53, becomes a believer, gets baptized and goes on his way rejoicing! This is a Holy Spirit-inspired divine collision that advances the Kingdom. Shouldn’t this type of “life-occurrence” be an expectation of, and be expected of, every Christian?

Then Acts transitions heavily to Saul/Paul, but my focus was not on Paul but on the regular guy Ananias, who was going about his regular life when a revelatory “word of knowledge” pops into his head (Acts 9:1-18). Herebefore, Ananias is only described as “a disciple who lived in Damascus” but God calls out to him in a vision: “Ananias!” “Go to a house on a Straight Street and ask for a man named Saul. I’ve told him that you are coming. Lay hands on him and restore his sight.” So God intersects his regular life and says “Stop what you’re doing and go talk to somebody for me... oh yeah, he happens to be a ruthless persecutor of the church who was just recently seen chuckling to himself while your friend Stephen was dying a brutal death, but don’t worry about that”. Once again, what made regular guy Ananias special was that he was tuned in and listening for God and when he heard God’s instruction he trusted it and obeyed. So he goes to Saul and addresses him as “brother Saul” (how’s that for a supernatural gift of faith!), “God has sent me so that you may see again and ***be filled with the Holy Spirit***”. He lays hands on Saul, Saul is healed of his blindness and becomes “Paul”, Paul is baptized, and he immediately begins to preach. This simple act of obedience, responding to a supernatural prompting of the Holy Spirit, by an otherwise unknown, regular guy, was key to Saul’s conversion, and through that event, catalyzing a massive expansion of the kingdom and in fact changing the entire world.

These stories tell me that in the kingdom of God, among his people, there should be a cultivated expectation of personal divine revelation and a regular occurrence of personal divine appointments that demonstrate God’s power, glorify Jesus, and expand His Kingdom. Is this your experience? Would you like it to be?

At communion, in partaking of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, we remember what Christ has done for us already and also that he will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. It reminds us that we are caught in the in-between time where, although we are assured of Christ’s ultimate victory, we are present witnesses of two kingdoms in conflict. But God through his present Holy Spirit, has not left us helpless and unprepared for this conflict. In fact he asks us to engage the battle and has given us all the protections and weapons that are needed (Kingdom Integrity: the seamless integration of Godly character with Godly power). Let us actively embrace this calling and take hold of these truths.

1 John 2:28 And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.

In His service,  
Steve

*<http://www.christourshepherd.org/pastlet.htm> (and follow links to download MP3 audio of sermon)*

## Announcements

**Congratulations to Adrian and Anni Li on the Birth of John Li just after 6:30 am on Mar 9. 7lbs. 10oz. and 19 inches!**

**WORSHIP TEAM:** We are having our monthly worship team practice tonight, Mar. 9th at 7:30pm. All who are interested in participating on the team are encouraged to come. Bring your voice or your instrument, and feel welcome to worship with us!

**DANCE WORKSHOP:** Amy Herbert will be leading a Dance Workshop tonight, Mar. 9 at 7:30 for women interested in learning how to incorporate dance/movement into their worship. Contact Amy if you are interested, 202-549-1112.

**MEN'S MINISTRY:** Luke and Matthew will be leading a group to attend a *Men's Conference* on April 17, 8am-5pm. Football coaches Tony Dungy, John Harbaugh, Jim Zorn and sports commentator James Brown will be speakers. If interested, email [matthew.tropiano@navy.mil](mailto:matthew.tropiano@navy.mil).

**CARE COMPANY SERVICE PROJECT:** On March 21st, from 12—4pm, we will be working with the Mid-Atlantic Gleaning Network (MAGNet), which gathers left-over farm crops from local farms and provides these to DC food kitchens and homeless shelters. We will be working in a warehouse where the food is sorted prior to distribution to the city. Please consider joining us (Families with children of all ages welcome!), and check the care company blog to register: [www.carecompanynews.blogspot.com](http://www.carecompanynews.blogspot.com).

**HEALING PRAYER CONFERENCE:** Judith MacNutt, of Christian Healing Ministries, will be leading a healing prayer conference at the Falls Church on May 5-6. For more information, visit [www.thefallschurch.org/healing](http://www.thefallschurch.org/healing).

**LUNCH AFTER CHURCH:** Katie Brown and Jim Song will be leading a group lunch after Church this Sunday at La Plaza 629 Penn Av, SE. Look for Jim and Katie outside in front of the church or meet them at restaurant.

*For general questions or building use inquiries, send an e-mail to [office@christourshepherd.org](mailto:office@christourshepherd.org).*

*To communicate updates for the pastoral letter and/or the church bulletin, send an e-mail to [ben@christourshepherd.org](mailto:ben@christourshepherd.org). The church bulletin will be completed by end of day on Thursdays.*

## Bulletin Board

Postings not officially sanctioned by COSC.  
Ads will be posted for up to 4 weeks. After that time period, please contact the church office to see if space will permit the ad to remain posted.

**HOUSING AVAILABLE:** I recently renovated the basement of my home in SE DC. My house is located on a quiet street, less than 15 minutes from Capital Hill. It's a great renovation with a full bath and complete kitchen. Over 600 sq. ft. with a private entrance, shared laundry room, street parking. Near completion and should be ready for move-in by Feb. 1. \$700 + 1/3 utilities. If interested, contact me, Cynthia at 703-371-3392 or [cryabbafather@yahoo.com](mailto:cryabbafather@yahoo.com).

**HOUSING AVAILABLE:** The building the Prichards live in (1507 Isherwood St. NE) now has 1 apt. (out of 4) available. It is 1 1/2 BR. About \$1,000/mo. The Prichards are really cool, so think about it!

**HOUSING AVAILABLE:** I'm a female GWU grad student looking for a roommate (possibly two). Rent for the master BR is \$725, includes heating. 9 blocks from Union Station and 20 min. to Eastern Market. Safe neighborhood and amazing deal! I would love to find a roommate who I can develop a friendship with and who is interested in living in a spiritually encouraging environment. Visit my blog if you would like to know more about me, [tashakolardc.blogspot.com](http://tashakolardc.blogspot.com). E-mail me if you are interested, [graceinmalawi@yahoo.com](mailto:graceinmalawi@yahoo.com).

## **EVENING OF HEALING PRAYER**

The Evening of Healing Prayer will be held on Tuesday, March 30th at 7:30 PM. This prayer service is open to all those currently attending a COSC homegroup. If you would like to schedule a 30 minute prayer appointment, please contact Deborah at the Church Office as soon as possible. If you would like to sit and pray silently, please call by Monday, March 29th, 202-544-9599.