

Straight from the "Hart"

Worship Service from September 5, 2021



Music (vv 1,3) Blessed Assurance

Music Trust and Obey

Theme Once upon a time, Strongbeard was the one of the most powerful pirates ever. He had a secret strength. He spent years raiding and pillaging all the things that made him strong. Rumor had it he had buried his secret to his power in various spots around the world. When some children found an old wooden chest that contained Strongbeard's initials on it, and in it a treasure map for children, they were really excited. They got ready for the treasure hunt.

They followed the clues from the map and arrived at a dark cave next to a lake. There they found a small treasure chest. In it they found a few power bars, a poster that had on it the letter O, and another map leading them to the next treasure chest. They went after the next treasure, and eventually discovered it in a hollow tree. In this treasure chest were some energy drinks and a poster that had on it only the letter B, and a map leading them to the next treasure chest. The maps were getting more difficult, the clues were getting harder to figure out, but they were still able to decode them. The next two had chests with similar healthy foods, maps to the next chest, and posters of the letters D & C. The last treasure chest also had some barbells, and a riddle which they finally solved, and the answer referred to a collection of paintings of people's parents.

They sat down with the healthy snacks and drinks and began to study the clues: The riddle's answer of -- pictures of people's parents, the barbells, and 4 posters with one of the letters of O, B, D, and C on them. They tried to solve the puzzle. Then one of the children remembered that Strongbeard was a Spanish Pirate. So if the letters were pronounced in Spanish, it wouldn't sound like Oh, Bee, Dee, See; but rather sound like "Oh, Bay, Day, Say!" And when you run those letters together into one big word they sound out the word obedece, which in Spanish means "obey". Add that to the barbells (strength) and pictures of parents and Strongbeard was trying to say that the secret his strength was to? ['Obey your parents'] It surprised them, but the pirate was really strong and so they began to follow the advice and they grew up to be very strong and mature, responsible children, especially inside. (Story abridged and adapted from *Stickybeard's Treasure* by Pedro Pablo Sacristán).

The Bible says something like that too. Paul said it this way in Ephesians: Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother”—this is the first commandment with a promise: [that promise is that] “so that it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth.” Of course, the assumption is that the parents are teaching God’s instruction and discipline, so as we strive to follow the way of our parents, we are striving to follow the way of the Lord, and that is how it will go well with us, and we will become strong people. And it is clear in Bible times that that commandment did not refer only to little kids as they were growing up, but as adults too with adult parents -- it lasts through our entire life. And to get at the heart of the principle, - as children of God, we become strong and mature by honoring and following the instructions of our heavenly Father as well, and Jesus gives us the Holy Spirit to help us accomplish this.

Responsive Reading (LR - Lay Reader C - Congregation)

Pastor: Paul elaborates in the responsive reading. Join me on the yellow font as Charles leads us with the white.

LR: You have been called to live in freedom. But don’t use your freedom to satisfy your sinful nature. Instead, use your freedom to serve one another in love. For the whole law can be summed up in this one command:

C: Love your neighbor as yourself...

LR: Let the Holy Spirit guide your lives. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves. The sinful nature wants to do evil, which is just the opposite of what the Spirit wants. And the Spirit gives us desires that are the opposite of what the sinful nature desires. These two forces are constantly fighting each other, so you are not free to carry out your good intentions.

C: But when we are directed by the Spirit, we are not under obligation to the law of Moses.

LR: When you follow the desires of your sinful nature, the results are very clear ... But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives:

C: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!

LR: Those who belong to Christ Jesus have nailed the passions and desires of their sinful nature to his cross and crucified them there.

C: Since we are living by the Spirit, we will follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives. (From Galatians 5:13-14,16-18, 22-25 (NLT))

Prayer Music Spirit of the Living God

Pastor's Most High God, we sing for your special touch on our lives in whatever way you see fit because we are confident that you will do in us and through us what is best for us, beyond even what we can ask or imagine. You strengthen us and give to us generously. We see it most in how you gave your Son Jesus who knowingly and willingly emptied himself for us that we can live joyfully before you. It is by his impartial love that we see how to love all people, and it is in his giving of the Holy Spirit that we are always forming a new community that is open to all people, empowered to love as you loved, giving of ourselves generously, sacrificially, for the sake of others, **Intercession** and so we pray for others that you have laid on our hearts and minds, for the continued recovery of Keith Voight, of Jennifer, of Gary White, for Will and family, for Mike Kennel, of Bruce Wright, and for Brian who tested positive for covid and for his wife Lisa as she health issues could make catching it troublesome... we pray for the people of New Orleans, and the professionals and volunteers serving that crisis there, and we continue to pray for the people suffering consequences from the Detroit flooding. We also pray for Jerry Weaver's mother-in-law Gloria who is in intensive care with multiple health issues, and for Kathy Novak's friend Cindy Perkins, whose father fell and broke his neck and she needs to find a place immediately that can provide care for both parents. And now Lord as we continue open our hearts in worship, your Word will be known and shown in the way we faithfully live as you taught us to pray. **LORD'S**

PRAYER

Bible Reading Introduction and Reading

In the simple classic teaching under which most of us grew up, John 3:16 makes it clear that God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whosoever - - whoever -- *everyone* who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. And yet from the earliest days of the church the question has been asked, sometimes with silent muttering, sometimes out loud: Who can be acceptable in God's sight? Who can be saved and grow in the Lord? Usually, this question is asked and answered from the viewpoint of God's people who are "in" as they evaluate the potential of those who are "out".

Today's reading is interesting because unless we are Jewish Christians, it puts us in the unusual position of being the ones who are seen as the unacceptable outsider. We are the ones written off as people God doesn't love, or is unable to reach, and who are not worthy. We are the ones hanging in the balance, and the

popular complaint of the day was that some people may be sympathetic to us and may be moving to let us in.

The critical leader who will speak for or against us has been steeped in the conservative Jewish tradition from birth, so if we were living in that New Testament moment, we would be very nervous. We wouldn't know that God had been working in Peter's life. We wouldn't know how through prayerful visions and circumstances and experiences; God was teaching Peter to include us in the faith. Luckily, Peter opened his eyes to the teaching of the Spirit and overcame a lifetime of teaching that opposed such thinking. And then he spoke and convinced the rest of the church to do so as well. Listen:

² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him [for associating with Gentiles]... ⁴ Peter began to explain it to them, step by step, saying, ⁵ "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision three times..., the voice from heaven [saying], "What God has made clean, you must not call profane" ¹¹ At that very moment three [Gentile] men, sent to me from Caesarea, arrived at the house where we were. ¹² The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us. These six brothers also accompanied me, and we entered the man's house... And as I began to speak, the Holy Spirit fell upon them just as it had upon us at the beginning. ¹⁶ And I remembered the word of the Lord, how he had said, 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.' ¹⁷ If then God gave them the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God?" ¹⁸ When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, "Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life."
(Selected verses from Acts 11:1-18 (NRSV))

It says Peter's eyes were opened because he remained open and teachable to the Holy Spirit... Before the sermon, let's stand and sing that we may be open to do the same...

Music **Open My Eyes That I May See**

Sermon ***Releasing the Power of the Spirit***

Did you notice how Luke phrased the last line of the reading? The church was happy about it, they praised God, but they said it in a way that indicated how the church felt about us at the time: "Then God has given *even to the Gentiles*" the

repentance that leads to life. The Spirit gives Peter a vision of foods that are unclean now made clean as a metaphor for people who were considered unclean because of their national, religious, or other heritage, whom God now made clean by the gracious blood of Christ. On the heels of this, the vision is combined with the immediate arrival of messengers from Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile, who had a vision to send for Peter. When Peter arrived at Cornelius's house, all the people there had assembled and they were eager to hear what Peter had to say, and they received the Spirit just as the disciples did at Pentecost. Peter concludes that Gentiles must be legitimate candidates for salvation and are able to receive the Holy Spirit and release his power in our lives to conquer the power, passions, practices, and habits of sin that defeat us -- and instill into our lives the fruit of the Spirit to help us in every situation.

Over the next weeks we will take a quick look at each characteristic of the Spirit's fruit and expand on each one, but for today; we simply want to look at Peter and the household of Cornelius and see if we can pick up some clues on how to release God's power in our life.

When we accept Jesus Christ to save us from our sins, our vices, our lostness in life; the Spirit of God enters our hearts and life. But even as he lives within us, he will guide us, but he will not force himself upon us. It is not like we suddenly become robots and we must follow the program of the Spirit. We still have our free will and choice. He will lead only as much as we allow him to lead us. As we live the Christian life, it is lived successfully in direct proportion to how much we release the Spirit in our lives to guide us and empower us.

When we stumble and fail; we may doubt ourselves, or we may doubt God's ability to work within us -- but it is not because God is not powerful, but because we did not release his power in that circumstance. We need to trust that the Holy Spirit can direct us step by step into Spirit led, Spirit empowered living. The first step to releasing him is believing -- that it can be done, and he will do it.

Peter and Cornelius were both in communication with God through the Holy Spirit. We may, or more likely, may not -- have visions

**How do we release his power?
Believe the Holy Spirit**

as Peter did -- but if we believe, if we expect that the Spirit will guide us; he will not fail to lead us where we need to get. We may not sense it, feel it, but as we open ourselves to him, and trust that he will get us where we need to be.

If we are going to release the power of the Spirit within us, we must believe, and secondly, we must remain teachable. There are at least two ways to stymie the power of the Spirit and be in danger of stagnating in spiritual growth by being unteachable. Let's use some hikers to illustrate ...

How do we release his power? Be Teachable

Down near the Andes, Elizabeth Eliot lived. Two hikers stopped by loaded with equipment and ready for an adventure into the rain forest. They sought no advice, just a few phrases to converse with the natives in case they happened to come across any. They wanted to do it all on their own, equipped only with an emergency phrase or two just in case. They had no desire to learn anything.

Stagnation comes when we don't want to learn

Some people may stagnate because they don't want to bother learning or growing. They may think they are already well-informed and well-equipped -- and march into life confidently. Whenever a problem emerges, there may be a few quick emergency prayer words..., but generally intending to keep relying on their own knowledge and equipment and resources to make it through the journey. Stagnation comes when we don't want to learn. If Peter had decided he didn't want to learn, Gentiles may not have been welcomed into the Christian church.

Peter did not receive that vision on the roof during a random quickie prayer to God during a crisis. "Oh I have to make a decision, what do you want God?" and Zap comes and answer and its all done. No, it was his custom to spend time in prayer -- listening to the Spirit's voice, getting acquainted with him, learning and being taught. And because of his consistent times of meditation and prayer, God was able to prepare Peter to learn a radically new truth.

Maybe it was not that those jungle hikers didn't want to learn. Maybe it was because they thought they already knew it. They already learned all they needed to learn to safely trek the jungle. It is only on the way,

Stagnation comes when we think we already learned it all

often, when plans or expectations get thwarted, when dysfunction or even crisis arrives that people begin to realize what they don't know as much as they thought they knew about that, or what they did know was wrong. But like those who don't want to learn in the first place, the ones who think they've learned it all are very reluctant to give up self-reliance, on that knowledge. They may want to release just enough control to the Spirit to get through the rough patch, but soon as they get through that hard part of the jungle, but then take the control back, "I can get it

from here, now, God.” Peter had been thoroughly trained from the day he was born that Gentiles could not be the people of God nor find God’s favor. That was the Jewish tradition. God’s people are the Jewish people, the only way to find God’s favor is to convert to Judaism. If Peter had determined his lifetime of Jewish training had taught him all he needed to know, we might still be outsiders to the church.

Eliot concludes *her* story by saying that maps, road signs, equipment, a few useful phrases when in a pinch are good and important things. But it is infinitely better if there is someone who has been there before and knows the way and is walking along with us - an actual “jungle guide”. What is best is for us is to pay attention to heed the wisdom of the Guide who is walking with us day by day.

At what point have we learned enough? At what point can we quit serving and learning?

When can we stop learning?

We like to think that once we graduate from high school we’ve got it all figured out. And when we figure out we haven’t, we go to college, and we think we’ve got it figured out, and then we realize we don’t, and so then we go to graduate school, and then we think we got it figured out, and then we go into the “real world” and we realize we still don’t know -- you know the phrase -- “the more you know, the more you know you don’t know?” If we stop learning, especially at the pace our culture is moving, we will be left far behind. Peter was at the peak of his ministry when he received these visions that radically transformed his ministry in that mother church at Jerusalem.

Saul was entrenched in what he believed was true and passionately defended it until he was confronted by Jesus on the road to Damascus and then everything changed for him and he became the apostle Paul, and after he had been preaching for at least 30 years, had a wider experience than most of us could dream of; (2 Corinthians 11-13); had turned his world upside down by his spiritual insight and holy living and instruction, and wrote a big portion of the last part of the New Testament, and after all of this, in jail and near the end of his inspired life, and facing martyrdom, he asks his trainee Timothy to bring his cloak, his parchments (his scrolls), and his books. (2 Timothy 4:13). He didn’t want to stop learning.

If these two very important apostles felt and saw the need to remain be teachable, then how much more should we? Can we remain open to new ideas? new approaches, new styles? new insights about God’s transforming grace for all people?

They say, "humans can live without air for a few minutes, water for a number of days, food for about two months, but they can go for years on end without a new thought." Don't let that happen to us...

It is not enough to trust in the Spirit and to learn to remain teachable. Peter believed in the Spirit, envisioned what the Spirit wanted to do; but the text also makes it clear that he acted on it -- he advocated for the legitimacy of the Gentile's faith in God through Jesus and the Gentiles found entrance into the church, at least in part, because of his actions.

If we trust God's Spirit to teach us; and to be actively obedient to his instruction, who knows what He may accomplish through us. Grab hold of this life Jesus offers.

**How do we release his power?
Be obedient to his leading**

There are those who grab hold of life and those who don't. A man drove down a lonely road one summer day. He saw a car with a flat tire on the side of the road. A woman stood looking down in dismay at the flat tire. He decided to be a Good Samaritan. As he changed the tire, he grew hot and sweaty and dirty in the hot sun.

He finished tightening the spare and the woman said, "Now be sure and let the jack down easily because my husband is sleeping in the back seat." Get a hold of life - learn and *do* God's will.

The only way to keep in step with the Spirit is to practice it day in and day out. Dreaming about it, reading about it, talking about it -- all good things. But it is critical that we develop a consistent daily practice (note that it is not a daily *perfection*, but a daily *practice*) of releasing the Spirit who is within us, and if we do that, as the days, months, years go by, he will get us where we need to be, where God wants us to be.

Hank, a landscape contractor -- his first full-fledged job. Of course, he didn't want to appear to be the rank amateur he knew he was, so he feigned a casual kind of nonchalant expertise about what he was doing. One of the first tasks he had to tackle was blasting out some stumps with dynamite for a farmer. Since the farmer was watching he went to some length to measure out the fuses and set the dynamite - just as if he really knew what he was doing. But his problem was he really didn't have any idea how much dynamite to use. When he was all set, he breathed a prayer that he had enough to lift the stump but not so much as to blow them to bits. They got away at a proper distance and the moment of truth came. Hank smiled at the farmer with what he hoped came across as confidence and

pushed the plunger. With a resounding boom the stump and roots flew out of the ground and across the field and landed on the cab of Hank's landscaping truck.

The very impressed farmer turned to Hank and said, "That was really good. A bit more practice and you'll be landing those suckers right in the bed of the truck in no time.

We may fail and lose in our attempts to perfectly release the power of God in our lives; but don't give up, just keep practicing, and adjusting, and learning, and obeying, and as we continue to cooperate with the Spirit, He will re-make us into better and better people -- becoming the best that we can become for who we are. God promises that He who began the work in you will not stop until it is complete. (Philippians 1:6)

A football team practiced running wind sprints for conditioning. One of the large tackles, Jack Katz, was one of the fastest linemen on the team. Katz asked Coach Graves if he could run sprints with the faster backs. Permission was granted.

To no one's surprise, Katz finished last in every race with the backfield runners. Coach asked if he wouldn't rather be a winner with the linemen than a loser in the with the backs. Katz said, "I'm not out here to outrun the linemen. I already know I can do that. I'm here to learn how to run faster; and if you've noticed, I'm losing by a little less every day."

The only way to find true and lasting love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control in your life is by releasing control to the Holy Spirit in your life; through trusting Him, learning from Him, not settling for the mediocre standards; but pressing forward; practicing full obedience on a daily basis.

And through cooperation with the Spirit, Jesus will save us from inner vices, empower us against outer temptations, help us to deal with quirks and sins that cause us to lose victory and freedom in our life. With the Spirit guiding our way, we will wind our way through the jungle of our life and to the land where God's love always flows.

Communion

Invitation And Jesus established through the communion table a perpetual reminder that his love is always flowing to us, and we only need invite him and be aware of his presence on the journey with us and continue to be open to his leading as we go...Let's prepare our hearts with prayer.

Confession Amazing God, there is more to life and to you than we can see or fathom, and yet too often we find ourselves too busy to plummet the depths of your teaching, or we think we already know all of your mysteries, we tame all of your dreams for us, put limits on what you can do in and through us. You never force yourself on us.

Assurance Remind us that your Spirit is always bringing new life, offering to surprise us with wonders and blessings. Grant us the ability to trust and believe, to learn and to grow, and to follow your guidance -- and in the adventure, may we discover our happiness in following Jesus and his presence...

Great Thanksgiving

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.** Lift up your hearts. **We lift them up to the Lord.** Let us give thanks to the Lord our God. **It is right to give our thanks and praise.** It is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to give thanks to you, Father Almighty, creator of everything that is. You gave us life. Even when didn't bother to learn, or thought we knew better and turned our love away from you, you remained faithful to us. You delivered us from our captivity, promised to be our God, and called to us through the prophets and ultimately, through your Son Jesus Christ; and so with your people on earth and all the company of heaven we praise your name and join their unending hymn. **Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.**

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ. Your Spirit anointed him to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives and give sight the unseeing, to set free the oppressed, and to announce your salvation. Jesus healed the sick, fed the hungry, and ate with sinners. By his suffering, death, and resurrection you gave birth to your people, delivered us from the power of sin and death, and made with us a new relationship covenant. Jesus promised to be with us always in the power of your Word and Holy Spirit. Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here, and at home, and on these gifts of bread and cup. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood. Therefore, we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving as a holy and living sacrifice, equipped by your Spirit to make us one with Christ, one with each other, one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory and fulfills our proclamation of the mystery of faith. **Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.**

And until he does, we ask, heavenly Father that the Spirit continues to breathe on us with your life, your love, your will, your presence, that we may be your presence wherever we go. Amen. Let's prepare to take in the Spirit's presence into us afresh through the elements by singing Breathe on Me, Breath of God, (Breath of God is another phrase that means "Holy Spirit")

Music (vv 1,2,3) Breathe on Me, Breath of God

It was in the upper room that the Spirit came upon the disciples who were praying at Pentecost, and it was in an upper room that Jesus invited his disciples to a last meal, where he took the bread, and he lifted it up, and gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said: "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." Take and eat.

When the supper was over, Jesus took the **cup**, and he lifted it up and gave thanks for it, and he gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and drink. This is my blood, shed for the forgiveness of your sins, and for the establishment of a new covenant with your God. As often as you drink it, drink it in remembrance of me."

Prayer Now through receiving this communion, may the Spirit again find a home in our hearts that we may live to God's glory. Amen.



Music Sweet, Sweet Spirit

Blessing Now go blessed and renewed by the Holy Spirit. Go with strength and courage. Go, knowing that our lives will help transform and renew the earth. Go knowing that the Holy Spirit always goes with us as companion and guide. Amen.