

Hearts on Fire: Stronger Together

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle within us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. May the words of my mouth, the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing in your sight O Lord, you who are rock, redeemer & Renewer of us all. Amen. (Ps 19:14)

Grace and Peace be with you, dear Friends!

How is it with your soul? How often have you used your GPS – God positioning system? In this *Hearts on Fire* series we've looked at the meaning of Discipleship and the holy habits that help us grow in spiritual identity and maturity. We've been challenged, to walk following Jesus' way, intentionally sowing seeds of peace, mercy and kindness and seeing value in every person as a child of God.

Today we focus on the results of using the holy habits in building God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. John Wesley and the early Methodists believed God was still speaking. However, hardened hearts, distractions, pride, possessions, temptations, and spiritual obstacles impede our hearing God speak.

So, the first question for reflection, have I made time for listening to God this week?

Hearts on Fire are kindled & fueled by time spent in prayer, study & action. As we hear from the beginning of the reading to the Hebrews, Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's plan for the salvation of humanity. We have much to be thankful for: In Christ Jesus, we have the most humble of servants and the greatest of messengers; With Christ, we are heirs of God's kingdom; Through Christ, we are united as siblings; and In Christ, we are stronger together as we love and serve God and God's people

The first reading today is our initial journey with the book of Hebrews. This writing is thought of more as a sermon than a letter. It is a word of encouragement for remaining faithful in the midst of challenging times. There are two points of encouragement.

First, Jesus is offered as the perfect human (God's Son) and high priest. Jesus offers himself as the perfect sacrifice to overcome sin and reconciles humanity with God through an eternal covenant in love.

Second, the writer encourages the reader to remain faithful and to overcome the temptation to turn away by holding on to the hope of salvation.

Attending to the Word of God given through Christ is the first step to truly knowing God. John Wesley puts it this way, "Christ in our hearts is a 'divine evidence or conviction' of God's free, unmerited love to us as sinners".¹

Sadly, the world around us is full of ways which cause distractions and obstacles to engaging in holy habits. Too much focus on the stuff in the world prevents our hearts and minds to be "stay'd on Jesus" (as the Spiritual encourages).

Reflect on this for a moment: When I wake up in the morning, what's my mind focused on? When I go to bed each evening, what's my mind focused on?

TFWS 2082 gives several reasons to have our mind focused on Jesus... you can't hate your neighbor in your mind... makes you love everybody with your mind... the devil can't catch you in your mind... Yes, Jesus is the captain in your mind, when you keep it stayed on Jesus.

These words of encouragement support us in our sufferings, our distractions and helps focus us on the real deal... the main thing...Jesus and moving to be more like Christ in our lives, being transformed so that we might participate in transforming others' lives to become disciples and the mission to transform the world.

In moving to the gospel, remember that Jesus has redefined his mission and what it means to be a disciple. The symbol of this new discipleship is the cross. The attitude of a disciple is to serve with JOY (Jesus, Others, Yourself).

¹ CEB Wesley Study Bible, 2012. Common English Bible:Nashville. p 1536.

In this story moment Jesus re-presents discipleship and having a heart on fire for God's kin-dom, not the human value system. Jesus has traveled on into Judea where crowds have gathered. Jesus teaches them, is tested by the religious leaders, and then teaches the disciples to deepen their understanding of how wide God's mercy and love really is.

This passage is one that calls many to reflect on the practice of divorce. For the people of the 21st century, we must hear this passage with ears of the 1st century. In this 'test', Jesus is being asked to choose one of two positions on divorce: divorce only in the case of unfaithfulness or divorce for any reason. However, Jesus avoids being boxed in by conservative or liberal politics. Instead, he anchors himself in the biblical creation story (v6) and the one-flesh principle.

In the private teaching moment with the disciples, Jesus expands his point on God's value system rather than a human value system in society. Initially, Jesus speaks of a woman's right to divorce in a patriarchal world because the disciples asked him for more clarity. Remember, women were considered as a possession or property. First, in v 11, the phrase 'commits adultery against her' is unheard of in 1st c Palestine. A man who commits adultery did so against the husband, not the wife. Second, in v 12, 'if a wife divorces her husband' is another radical thought because women had no right of divorce. Markan Commentator David Fenton Smith puts it this way, 'The kin-dom of God is NOT valuing divorce-leniency, but is saying that women are not to be treated as chattel (property or slave) and without voice in their own well-being.'² Then the children come into focus. As with previous moments, In this narrative Jesus is clearly saying the kin-dom of God values women AND children.

Quite honestly, the kin-dom of God values every person of all ages, all cultures, and all places. The question for us as followers of Jesus, do we love as Jesus loves? Jesus elevates all who are disenfranchised, dismissed and devalued as owners and inheritors of the kin-dom of God. Our challenge this week is to live so that we are in communion and connection with one another; stronger together in Jesus' way.

² 'Mark' in Wesley One Volume Commentary, 2020. Abingdon Press: Nashville. 605.

The call to Discipleship, taking up the cross, involves a commitment to let go of this world (its things, its ways) and participate in a life of grace (prayer, study, and action) that is prioritized with JOY and living into the wisdom of God's kin-dom. Living with JOY (Jesus first, Others as Yourself) is the pattern of a faithful life What will you do differently this week because of this Word? How will you participate in building God's kin-dom or earth as it is in heaven?

I continue to pray daily for you (and for me) that we may live with JOY so that all may know we are Jesus' Disciples with Hearts on Fire.

May it be so. So be it. Amen.

Let us JOIN TOGETHER WITH THE LITURGIST, Mary Anne Espenshade, AS SHE LEADS us in prayers for God's people, church & World ...