

Message for Sunday, October 11, 2026

Scripture: Acts 8: 14-25

Title: Away Mission

Welcome

Announcements: Giving Options...online, QR code, in the offering plate, box in the back. Explainer video for World Communion Sunday; White rose on the altar is in memory of Mary Whitla; Names for All Saints Day-call or email the office if you would like someone's name read during the service; Knit Crochet Group will meet on Wednesday at 9:30AM; Food Bank needs nonperishables; Interfaith Workshops start on Sunday, October 25th at 2PM-First one is Buddhism; Pastor Appreciation Month

Fellowship of Love

Song

Call to Worship

L: Rejoice in God always!

P: Rejoice in God's steadfast love.

L: Rejoice in Christ's enduring grace.

P: Rejoice in God's saving Word.

L: Rejoice in the Spirit's gentle guidance.

P: Rejoice in God's healing presence.

L: Again I say rejoice!

Unison Prayer

Holy God, we come into your house with praise on our lips and songs of joy in our hearts.

We come to stand firm in our conviction: that good is stronger than evil, that love is stronger than hate, that truth will ultimately win the day.

We come to be grounded in Christ.

L: As we come to this time of offering, let us remember that giving is an opportunity to respond to God's generosity with our own.

Offering/Song

Scripture: Acts 8:14-25 NRSVue

14 Now when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them.

15 The two went down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit

16 (for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus).

17 Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

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18 Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money,

19 saying, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit."

20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain God's gift with money!

21 You have no part or share in this, for your heart is not right before God.

22 Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.

23 For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and the chains of wickedness."

24 Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may happen to me."

25 Now after Peter and John had testified and spoken the word of the Lord, they returned to Jerusalem, proclaiming the good news to many villages of the Samaritans.

L: The word of God, for the people of God.

P: Thanks be to God.

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A while ago I started rewatching Star Trek Next Generation. This is the Star Trek I grew up with, though I have seen some of the Original Star Trek episodes it's not my favorite. Even though I have seen all the movies, I recently started rewatching because I needed something to watch while Katie and Sophia weren't home. I didn't focus on the show while I did things, it was just be background noise.

In Star Trek there are "away missions". If you're not familiar with the genera an "away mission" is usually when a part of the crew of the space ship goes down to a planet surface. Naturally this is usually when something happens or something goes wrong. I can tell you from watching the original and Next Generation, if you go on an away mission in the original series, I hope you aren't wearing a red shirt cause you are going to die. In Next Gen I hope you aren't wearing a gold shirt, because odds were you were going to die. VERY unlucky colors.

Our scripture passage today reminded me of an away mission where the members of the Enterprise needed to go down to the surface to be able to tell if the people who

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lived there were ready to meet them, “first contact” it’s called. In our passage today it feels a bit like first contact. Peter and John are sent from Jerusalem to see if God really is working in the Samaritan people.

There are some difficult parts of today’s passage that we need to unpack a little bit, but I hope by unpacking them and by looking at what happens maybe we’ll walk away with an understanding for what it means for our lives. First I need to remind you about Samaritans. If you recall, in the gospel of Luke, there is the story of the good Samaritan. I know many of us have heard sermon after sermon on that passage. We know that the Samaritan is the only one who did right, and many of us know that the Samaritans would have been considered vile to the person who was being treated, or the other Jewish people who passed him by. We don’t necessarily understand why there is so much bad blood between the two groups so let’s do some history.

Samaria was located in an area that would have been a part of the northern kingdom of Israel. Many of these people would have been descendants of the Northern Kingdom, and they had different worship practices, and believed they were worshiping the same God. Now the southern Kingdom wasn’t as kind to them. In fact, when the southern Kingdom came back from exile one of the things that Ezra, who lead them back, did was to destroy the places of worship that the Samaritan people had built. Really what we are looking at is a divided family who didn’t like each other. Because of this there would be a tendency amongst good practicing Jewish people to not trust the Samaritans, and the inverse of that would be true as well.

The second thing that is difficult about this passage is the implication that Peter and John came and bestowed the baptism of the Holy Spirit, expressed as a separate action in this passage, on the Samaritan believers. There is a lot to unpack in this. First, does this imply that there is a separate distinct baptism to receive the Holy Spirit? The short answer is no...the long answer is no as well. This is the only incident in the book of Acts that implies two separate events. In ever other location when people believe in Jesus the Holy Spirit is present. To me this means that something else is going on which we will get to in a minute. Secondly, does this mean that the Holy Spirit only comes from other people praying for you? And again the answer is no. This is one of those lessons that we need to remember that just because it happens this way one time doesn’t mean it happens like this all the time.

Here is what I think is happening. Remember last week I reminded you that Peter and John are not Christian? They are in fact still Jewish; their theology is developing and not much time has passed. The reason for me pointing this out is do you honestly think

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Peter and John left their own biases at home? Their childhood and adulthood steeped in discrimination towards the Samaritans was people just completely wiped out? I doubt it. Yes, they heard the story of the good Samaritan, but I don't think people tend to change that quickly. I think we have a tendency to think in the old ways until we train ourselves to think and act differently. In a few chapters Peter falls victim to his old ways of thinking. He thinks that a Roman's house is unclean and doesn't want to go in. It takes a vision from heaven to change his mind. Why would here be any different?

I think the reason that the Samaritans needed to receive the Holy Spirit in a second step by direct interaction of the disciples is because God needed to send them on an *away mission*. God sent the disciples to see what was happening, and sent the Holy Spirit after they laid hands, not because the Samaritans didn't have the Spirit or didn't believe rightly or needed correcting, but because the disciples needed to be reminded that the Gospel of Christ is for everyone. Not just them. What this story is about is countering the bias that the disciples have so that they can see how God is working and moving in others around them.

This plays into how we as Methodists view Baptism. Bear with me here. You see we learn when we do the Baptism liturgy that the people who receive Baptism are receiving it from God, not from us. In Baptism it is a grace that God extends to us. We call this prevenient grace, God's grace at work in us and through us all the time. The next step is realizing that God is doing that with everyone around you. I think that is what is happening here. God is overriding the disciple's bias's, changing their perspective to help them realize that God is at work in every person. Even Samaritans.

Like it or not we all have bias'. We all have people we struggle with; we struggle with seeing God at work in their lives, we struggle to see how God could be using them. The truth is: God is; and sometimes God breaks down those barriers. I don't think we should be waiting for God to do that for us. I think we need to realize that we need to open ourselves to see God at work in others. That is the challenge for us today. How open can we be to see God at work all around us? Amen.

Pastoral Prayer/The Lord's Prayer

Song

Benediction

Song