

SERMON: "THE SPIRIT ... ENGAGES US"

TEXTS: OLD TESTAMENT ISAIAH 53:1-6
NEW TESTAMENT ACTS 9:36-43

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INTRODUCTION

What motivates you to get involved?

It's easy in our day and time to not get involved, easy to be a spectator
That is one appeal of the megachurches. Many go, but don't get involved
It's just as easy to be a commentator too. Watch it, try it. Hit the like button
Post something, make a comment on someone else's post

I remain convinced that the primary identity we all have that we may not admit is
we are consumers. We are always being marketed to, someone has something
to sell us. We're shopping – we want what we want when we want it
That mentality shapes how we look at the world, how we look at each other
We can be quite transactional. I think it helps us to admit that about ourselves

So I ask again ... What motivates you to get involved?

Given that this is a series of sermons on the work of the Holy Spirit,
I would suggest that is the answer. The Spirit gets us motivated,
gets us involved. The Brief Statement of Faith says it this way

*The same Spirit who inspired the prophets and apostles
rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture, engages us
through the Word proclaimed, claims us in the waters of baptism,
feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
and calls women and men to all ministries of the Church.*

The Spirit inspires, rules, engages, claims, feeds and calls
That is how the Spirit is at work in our lives, in our world
That is how the Spirit is seen at work in the story of the early Church
Acts is a well-named book. There's all sorts of activity – all Spirit led
The disciples are on the move, spreading the word, doing good.

They are a motivated and involved bunch. We pick up the story following Peter.
Our passage is the second of two healing stories. Lots of healing stories in Acts
Isn't that a clear message about why we get involved - to be healers
of body and soul, to see pain and to bring comfort

**In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is
Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. About that
time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed
in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard
that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please
come at once!"**

BELIEF

Peter goes with them. But he doesn't go there to mourn.

He healed her. He raised her from the dead. Rather shocking, but not surprising
Not surprising based on what we've been hearing as we read through Acts.

These early believers were a bold bunch of believers. They were motivated

Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

What motivated Peter to even think of raising her from the dead?

I would answer, based on reading all of Acts, is ... belief.

Peter believed in the power of the risen Christ. He knew and trusted
that God was at work in the world, including through him

How about you, how does your belief in a living God motivate you?

I hear the argument against. It is often voiced from a place of pain and frustration

Look at the suffering in the world, listen to the bullies boast, watch the con artists
and snake oil salesmen rake in the money ... is there a loving, powerful God?

My answer is "Yes there is." I've been diagnosed with a case of stubborn

And I'm not going to let the people I just mentioned define my worldview

Not going to give them that power. I will not give into cynicism.

I do believe and trust in a loving, powerful God – one who likes lots of healing stories

I didn't go into ministry trusting in my own skills. "Hey, y'all. Watch this!"

I just want to highlight what I see God doing, tap into that, lend a hand

And what I see is a God writing healing stories with all sorts of settings

I see people empowered by the Spirit – engaged, motivated, involved.

Me saying over and over again that "Jesus is on the loose" isn't just me being cute

It is the very core of my worldview. I'm not so much for a faith rooted in back then,
remember Jesus – what he said and did. It's about those same things happening

today, about God at work healing the brokenness of our world here and now

My faith is much more than a rule book or a guide (certainly more than a report card)

It is not about believing in how right (or righteous) I am. It's about believing in
and being part of God's ongoing work ... more healing stories to tell

I got to that belief through the other two things that I would suggest motivate us

to get involved. I am motivated by my belief. But my belief was and is rooted
in two other motivators – belonging and being part of the solution.

BELONGING

What motivates you to get involved? Belonging does. Being part of something motivates us to get involved, in this church, in the early Church
Again, I need to back up and preach about Acts as a whole
The book begins with the power of the Holy Spirit bringing people together
That is followed by two stories about how “they held everything in common”

Those stories highlight a sense of openness, radical and intentional hospitality
A sense of togetherness. So too the passage last week that focused on how they resolved some differences. Acts includes a few stories like that too
The early church we find in Acts is a bold bunch, very much in this together

That is very much part of our story here as we seek to be a place for everyone
We do the work together ... with each other, for each other
Some of y'all should be on the nominating committee every year
You're just that good at getting people to agree to serve
What motivates us to get involved? We do – that togetherness, belonging

An example I'd offer, being a history nerd (and a fan of World War 2 movies)
Watch just about any World War 2 movie and they will feature a funny guy, usually an Italian, usually from Brooklyn. Every unit seemed to have one
The subtle message from central casting – “we're all in this together”

These movies highlighted how the war introduced Americans to other Americans
Men from Idaho and Iowa served with men from New York and New Mexico
The message was clear - we belonged to one another, to something bigger
We could use that reminder again in our day and time, couldn't we?

We see that sense of togetherness in this passage as Luke, who wrote Acts, makes sure to mention the other women and how they were there to mourn, to support one another in their grief, to remember Dorcas – her good work
They even held the robes she had made as reminders

Being part of something bigger, belonging, motivates to get involved
It is not just institutional loyalty that motivates us (that belief in organizations and institutions has faded over time, some even fight against those institutions)
But the idea of serving each other, of being part of something together that continues to motivate us.

What motivates you to get involved? Believing does. Belonging does.
So too does being part of the solution. We want to help.
Dorcas is named as someone who was ‘always doing good, helping the poor’
Peter went to Dorcas home because he wanted to help

Acts is full of healing stories because the Church saw the need
Good rule of thumb from our reading through Acts ... does our getting involved do good, help the poor, lead to healing? Important question to ask ourselves

SUMMARY

You see our motivations often begin with our frustrations – we see a problem
We may be angry about it. Marvin Gaye put it so well in his music
“Make me want to holler.” I get it. I know that feeling
But what purpose does our anger serve?

I heard a great distinction the other day about the purpose of protest
The purpose is to point to the problem. To name it. To point out injustice
Successful protests do that. Then the next step – solutions
Naming what can be done. It may be something we ask of government
It may be something we do through other organizations.

It may be something new. Like how we started Sunday Supper
Solutions are usually a mix of all those things. Sunday Supper an example
We could not feed 100 people a week a good meal if we didn't have the Food Bank
and we would not have a food bank without government programs
to help low-income people and to help farmers. It is all very interdependent

This place for everyone lives into that ideal through efforts like Sunday Supper
Through efforts to address the needs in our community, to get involved
to find ways to love our neighbors, including being allies, standing up for
and speaking up for those who are marginalized

Going forward in ministry, ministry in a rapidly changing cultural context,
I see the Church being called more and more into that kind of motivation
naming the brokenness and being part of the solution. That is our growing edge

The world many of us grew up in where most everyone went to church
where your summer choices were the Methodist VBS, the Lutheran VBS, etc.
has expanded to a world full of choices – choices beyond church
That variety of options has led to a more secular society
It is not a plot by global elitists. It's just our market driven world

That is producing a shift in how we do ministry – one choice among many
For many of us a shared sense of belief led to belonging which led to being part
of a solution. Now I'd suggest that order is in reverse. Service before sermons

People outside the church care about their community, about our world.
If we want others to experience a church as a place for everyone
we begin not with telling them what to believe or how to behave
we join them in being part of the solution – we march with them, work with them,
meet with them, listen to them. That can and will lead naturally to belonging
and that belonging to believing.

That is how I see the Spirit engaging us. I'm kind of excited to see where that leads
I'm motivated to get involved. How bout you?