

*Torn Apart***1st Sunday of Lent****North East United Methodist Church****March 10, 2019****Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian****Mark 1: 9-15 (NLT)**

One day Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, “You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy.”

The Spirit then compelled Jesus to go into the wilderness, where he was tempted by Satan for forty days. He was out among the wild animals, and angels took care of him.

Later on, after John was arrested, Jesus went into Galilee, where he preached God’s Good News. “The time promised by God has come at last!” he announced. “The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!”

PRAYER

On the wings of a snow white dove, he sends his pure sweet love...A sign from above, on the wings of a dove...



When troubles surround us, when evils come...The body grows weak, the spirit grows numb...When these things beset us, he doesn't forget us, he sends down his love, on the wings of a dove...When Noah had drifted on the flood many days, he searched for land in various ways...Troubles, he had some, but he wasn't forgotten, he sent him his love, on the wings of a dove...When Jesus went down to, the river that day, he was baptized in the usual way, and when it was done, God blessed his son, he sent him his love, on the wings of a dove...On the wings of a

snow white dove, he sends his pure sweet love...A sign from above, on the wings of a dove.

When I hear these lyrics and I read of Jesus' baptism in Mark's Gospel, I find the contrast striking.

Jesus went down to the Jordan River to be baptized by John the Baptist. Mark 1: 10-11 (NLT) - ***As Jesus came up out of the water, he saw the heavens splitting apart and the Holy Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice from heaven said, "You are my dearly loved Son, and you bring me great joy."***

Certainly, God sent His love to His Son that day *"on the wings of a snow white dove."*



But this dove, the Holy Spirit, brings much more than the love and peace so many have sang about.

As Rodney J. Hunter points out, this dove brings *"upheaval"* and *"reorganization."* The heavens are *"split apart"*...the NRSV translation says, *"torn open"*...And then the same Spirit, who descended upon Jesus as a dove, *"compelled"* him...the NKJV translation says, *"immediately drove him"*...into the wilderness...alone



Stanley P. Saunders puts it this way...*"Jesus' baptism marks for him the end of the old world and the beginning of a new one, as is made clear as soon as he arises from the Jordan and sees the heavens themselves being torn-apart. The image is both violent and hope-filled. The*

only other place Mark uses this word for ripping and tearing is in the description of the events that take place at the moment Jesus dies on the cross, when the veil of the temple is torn in two, from top to bottom. In both cases, God is doing the ripping.”

“God is doing the ripping.” These words paint in my mind a different picture from *“On the wings of a snow white dove, he sends his pure sweet love...”*

Yes, God’s Holy Spirit does open our eyes and hearts to see and experience God’s *“pure sweet love.”* Paul tells us in Romans 5:5 (NLT), ***“And this hope will not lead to disappointment. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.”*** But God’s Holy Spirit also convicts and convinces...

Before Jesus sat off to Jerusalem to carry His cross...Jesus is speaking to His disciples...They are bewildered and grief-stricken...they realize they are going to lose Jesus...but Jesus explains that this is necessary...when He goes away, the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Helper, will come...When Jesus was in the body, He could not reach the minds and hearts and consciences of men and women everywhere; He had confined Himself to time and place. But the Spirit could go anywhere and everywhere. The Spirit would be the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise in Matthew 28:20, ***“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”***

Jesus explains to His disciples in John 16: 8-11 (The Message) that ***“When [The Holy Spirit] comes, he’ll expose the error of the godless world’s view of sin, righteousness, and judgment: He’ll show them that their refusal to believe in me is their basic sin; that righteousness comes from above, where I am with the Father, out of their sight and control; that judgment takes place as the ruler of this godless world is brought to trial and convicted.”***

In other words, the Holy Spirit will “tear” into us. The Holy Spirit will (1) convict people of sin; (2) convince people of righteousness; and (3) convince people of judgment.

William Barclay, in his commentary on The Gospel of John, talks about these “tearings” in our lives by the Holy Spirit.

First, the Holy Spirit convicts people of sin. Barclay tells the story of an Indian village, where a missionary was telling the story of Christ by means of slides projected on the whitewashed wall of a village house. When the picture of the cross was shown, one man stepped forward, as if he could not help it: *‘Come down!’* he cried. *‘I should be hanging there – not you.’*



Barclay goes on to ask, *“Why should the sight of a man crucified as a criminal in Palestine 2,000 years ago tear open the hearts of people throughout the centuries and still today? It is the work of the Holy Spirit.”*

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit convinces people of righteousness. Barclay writes, *“It is amazing that men and women should put their trust for all eternity in a crucified Jewish criminal. It is the work of the Holy Spirit...who convinces people of the sheer righteousness of Christ...”*

Lastly, Barclay states that the Holy Spirit convinces people of judgment. He writes, *“It is the Spirit who gives us the inner and unshakable conviction that we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God.”*

But Barclay adds one more...explaining that the Holy Spirit also gives us the certainty that in the cross of Christ is our salvation and that with Christ we are forgiven. The Holy Spirit not only convicts us of our sin but convinces us of our Savior.

The Holy Spirit *“tears”* into us and reminds us as Joel did in Joel 3:3, ***“Don’t tear your clothing in your grief; instead, tear your hearts.”***

In a time when the tearing of garments was an expression of deep emotion in times of terror, grief, or over the horror of some misfortune...the prophet Joel calls on the people to rend their hearts rather than their garments...to approach God in sincerity rather than by ritual and tradition...to beseech God’s mercy through genuine mourning for sin...the complete turning away from destructive patterns, from selfish inclinations...from any behavior, action or attitude that is not of God... As David J. Lose writes, *“God wants the whole person, not some outward sign, and God will get the whole person, whether through genuine repentance or divine retribution.”*

This past Wednesday, we entered the season of Lent...with the imposition of ashes reminding us that we are frail and flawed creatures, in need of repentance and dependent on the grace of God.



Reminding us that we come from God, the Creator, and we return to God...*ashes to ashes, dust to dust.*” Ash Wednesday began Lent’s invitation to look inward, examining our souls and our relationship to God...preparing ourselves for the day of His coming...allowing the Holy Spirit to tear our hearts and drive us into the wilderness, helping us to discover what in our lives is contrary to the ways of God and fall to our knees like David confessing, Psalm 51: 1-4 – ***“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge.”***

God sends His Holy Spirit into our hearts and immediately begins an *“upheaval”* and *“reorganization.”* God begins a transformation. As Paul wrote, *“the old life is gone; a new life has begun.”* Suddenly behaviors and thoughts we have practiced are seen in a different light, priorities are realigned with God’s Word, practices are changed, forgiveness is given and sought out...We begin to look at everything different, through the eyes of God. Our lives are truly *“reorganized”* as God takes us through a metamorphosis.

For us, this is not a forty-day wilderness experience as in the life of Jesus, one who was without sin, but for us it is a life-long process, involving our surrendering to God and wrestling for God’s meaning afresh every day. We must allow God to “rip” away what we know or think we know...we must allow God to “tear apart” our hearts and remold our hearts to be more in line with Him...we must allow God to transform us and make us new. We must recognize that at times the Holy Spirit convincing and convicting us can be unpleasant but is still *“his pure sweet love”* at work. Proverbs 3: 11-12 (NLT) tells us, ***“My child, don’t reject the LORD’s discipline, and don’t be upset when he corrects you. For the LORD corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights.”***

And just as Jesus had it confirmed that He was God’s Son that day He came up out of the Jordan, we too have it confirmed by the Holy Spirit that we are God’s children. I John 3: 1 tells us, ***“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”*** And the Lord, our God, the Lord, Jesus Christ, loves us

enough to send His Spirit to correct us...to convince us and convict us...to tear into us, remolding our hearts into the shape of the heart of the Savior.



Naturally, we don't enjoy this process...when the Holy Spirit gets hold of us...what John Wesley would call "sanctifying grace."

I shared a story Wednesday night that Max Lucado tells about his daughter. He writes, *"When my daughter was a toddler, I used to take her to a park not far from our apartment. One day as she was playing in a sandbox, an ice-cream salesman approached us. I purchased her a treat, and when I turned to give it to her, I saw her mouth was full of sand. Where I had intended to put a delicacy, she had put dirt. Did I love her with dirt in her mouth? Absolutely. Was she any less of my daughter with dirt in her mouth? Of course not. Was I going to allow her to keep the dirt in her mouth? No way. I loved her right where she was, but I refused to leave her there. I carried her over to the water fountain and washed out her mouth. Why? Because I love her. God does the same for us. He holds us over the fountain. "Spit out the dirt, honey," our Father urges. "I've got something better for you." And so he cleanses us of filth; immorality, dishonesty, prejudice, bitterness, greed. We don't enjoy the cleansing; sometimes we even opt for the dirt over the ice cream. "I can eat dirt if I want to!" we pout and proclaim. Which is true—we can. But if we do, the loss is ours. God has a better offer."*

Paul writes in Romans 12: 1-2, ***"And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."***

The word "transformed" comes from the Greek word "metamorphoo (met-am-or-fo'-o)," which means "to change into another form, to transform, to transfigure." The word "metamorphosis" is derived from this word, which we use to describe the process of a caterpillar changing into a butterfly.

Paul says, "Let God transform you..." Let God "change you," take you through "metamorphosis." Paul is not talking about a simple change...a simple learning of new habits...a simple breaking of a few old, bad behaviors...Paul is not simply talking about adding

to your already existing life by going to church, joining a small group, and taking part in a Bible study...We are talking total “transformation” – Paul writes, 2 Corinthians 5:17, ***“This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”***

Look at the caterpillar...it will crawl up a tree and attach itself beneath a leaf through the spinning of a cocoon.



Under the leaf, it is protected from the elements that might destroy the process. Once it has spun the cocoon around itself, it can never go back. So, the caterpillar is brought to a place of total submission and trust as it hangs helplessly beneath this leaf trusting that the cocoon will not come loose and fall to the ground and that the caterpillar will come forth different. The caterpillar then begins to go through a metamorphosis process in which his old nature will pass away and a new nature will emerge.



The process within the cocoon is a long process but at the very last stage the butterfly will break forth fluttering everywhere...never having to crawl again...never again having to view life from an earthly perspective...now his view is from the heavens...

Our transformation, that God calls us to, is no less dramatic...and requires, like the caterpillar, submission, trust, and a dying to the old self.

Throughout the scriptures, God’s Word speaks of the condition of the human heart and the transformation that must take place. Jesus says, Matthew 15:19, ***“For from the heart come evil***

thoughts, murder, adultery, all sexual immorality, theft, lying, and slander.” Humankind has a very serious heart condition...and God wants to change, transform the human heart. For many of us we have had our old hearts so long, that they have become hardened. This shows itself in our unwillingness to forgive, it is seen in human conflicts from playground antics to corporate conspiracies, it is seen in our quickness to put ourselves above others.

Many of our hearts are so hardened in fact, that spiritual atrophy has set in...our hearts are decaying...and it is irreversible unless God intervenes to reverse it. For many of us, it is very difficult to see in ourselves our need for transformation...our need for heart surgery...seeing our own hard heartedness is painful...seeing our need for transformation scary...

Once again, we may have added many good things to our daily lives...like going to church, studying the Bible, and serving others, but we have yet to climb up the tree and hang helplessly beneath a leaf, trusting God to protect us and care for us...trusting God to totally transform our hearts into a heart like Christ...a heart that is, as it says in I Corinthians 13: 4-7, ***“patient and kind...not jealous or boastful or proud or rude...does not demand its own way...is not irritable, keeps no record of being wronged...does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out...never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance.”***

God is ready to transform us...to soften and massage our hearts...The Holy Spirit is ever present to transform that which is willing to be transformed...This is the first step toward any spiritual problem...the first step toward complete transformation in Christ...WILLINGNESS...We as Christians, as a church...We decide the posture we will take in embracing transformation. We decide. It is our choice.

Like Jesus we must take a posture of submission...Jesus was sinless...why would He need to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins...what did He have to repent about...Yet, He submitted Himself to His Heavenly Father...He allowed the Spirit to “drive” Him into the wilderness...and when He came out, Jesus announced, *“The time promised by God has come at last! The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!”* Transformed by God, empowered by His Spirit, Jesus’ ministry began and the world was never the same.

So how do we go there? Moment by moment. Every moment of every day brings a decision...and it is in those decisions...those moment-by-moment faith choices that we must surrender...that we must allow God to transform us...these moment-by-moment faith choices are hard because they are continual...you can never stop making them...In the moment asking what does God wants you to do...Asking what does God wants you to focus on...Seeking how you can surrender the moment to Him...Attempting to determine what God wants you to watch, to do, to say...

These moment-by-moment faith choices will lead us to take on the mind of Christ...allowing God to *“transform the way we think”* - For many these moment-by-moment faith choices are just too high a price to pay and it is why so many people spend their lives crawling along the ground,

never experiencing what it is like to spread their wings, burst out of the cocoon that holds them, and fly high above the earth as they were created to do...

If you open your heart to God and His Holy Spirit...His Spirit will fill you with God's amazing love and forgiveness...it will come down "*on the wings of a snow white dove*" straight into your heart...but God's Holy Spirit will also "tear apart" everything you know, transform the way you think, what you see when you look at your life, your neighbors, the Word of God...the Holy Spirit will "*reorganize*" and cause "*upheaval*" in your life...the Spirit will "*drive*" you into the wilderness so you might fall on and rely on the strength of God to fight the temptations there, to overcome the trials and tribulations, to learn from God's loving correction, to become stronger so you might be ready for the tasks that lay ahead...

No one should ever say that total transformation is easy...What God wants is our heart, and what he wants to do is bring our hearts from death to life...to "*tear*" out the old and make new...In nearly every case of Jesus' call to repent, the thing that must be given up to follow is the thing held most dear...Being changed from who we are is never easy...It took a perfect man, the very Son of God, being tortured to death to even make it possible...

This is what Lent is about...a "*tearing of the heart*"...a "*wilderness*" experience...saying to God, "*Lord, over these next forty days... 'tear' my heart...send your Holy Spirit and allow Him to work within me, helping me to examine my life, my faith, my walk, my actions, my speech, my thoughts, my heart, my love for neighbor and you...Transform me...Reorganize my life...but please be gentle, Lord...send down your love 'on the wings of a snow white dove' and help me, moment by moment, convicted of my sin and convinced of your love and grace, live for you. Amen.*"