

Sermon for September 25, 2021

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I'm not sure how many of you have had an appointment at Essentia lately, but let me tell you, getting there this is no small feat. As Essentia moves through the different stages of construction on the new building and surrounding area, the landscape is always changing. One day you can drive down Third Street, the next day it is closed. One day you can enter the parking ramp, the next day you are rerouted. It is a scavenger hunt for a point of entry. Once you have accessed that day's entrance you then must navigate your way through the elevators and skywalk systems. 3 skywalks and 3 elevators, 15 minutes and a large number of steps later, you reach your destination only to discover registration is now on a different floor and the lab has relocated.

For some reason as I wandered those halls slightly lost, surrounded by grumbling, discouraged people in search of their destinations, longing for the construction to be over and the new to open and simplify life, I thought of our First Reading and Moses and the Israelites. The landscape around the people had changed. They wandered in the wilderness, not sure where God was leading. They were frustrated that it didn't look like they expected, it was not yet the promised land. They were tired of wandering and they strongly craved better, easier days where there would once again be meat and not manna. Moses gets angry, not only at the people, but at God. "Why have you treated me so badly God?...I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me."

Back to Essentia for a moment...Amidst all these detours and on either side of the elevator doors that open both ways, dotted along the endless hallways and skywalks are Essentia employees – lots and lots of Essentia employees. Each one of these employees asks "Do you know where you are going? Can I help you on your way?" This process of making it through the construction period is not made possible by the strong leadership of one person but rather has demanded the involvement of an army of individuals. In addition to these hired helpers every elevator ride, every new turn you can encounter other patients helping one another find their way. "Yep – I was here yesterday just go down that hall" or "Follow me I'm going that way as well" or "We can be lost together."

God hears the Israelites weeping and listens as Moses laments and then says "Gather for me 70 of the elders...bring them to the tent of meeting and have them take their place there with you." Successfully navigating life in the wilderness, reaching the promised land, keeping the faith, will not be dependent on one strong leader but will require larger involvement. The Lord comes down and speaks to the elders and the spirit rests upon them. These 70 are recruited and equipped – kind of like those additional employees hired to assist throughout the hallways. In the meantime, two additional men who have not gone to the tent but also have the spirit resting upon them, begin to speak to the people – possibly like other patients in the elevators and hallways. When there is concern over who should be assisting in this wilderness wandering, Moses replies "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit on them!"

Life in the wilderness, not yet living in the promised land, is hard. The work that needs to be done is endless. It becomes easy for people to become discouraged and go astray. It takes an army of individuals filled with the spirit, an endless number of people in the name of the Lord to step up, to encourage people in this journey of faith, to carry the heavy load.

“Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his Spirit on them.” In our baptisms we are, everyone of us, sealed with the Holy Spirit. We believe that the Holy Spirit equips and sends us out to be workers/helpers amidst the wilderness, the construction, the ever changing landscape of the world. The journey through the wilderness, through times of change, requires more than one good leader, it requires the intentional recruiting and training of individuals meeting specific needs, as well as individuals filled with the Spirit, seeking out every available opportunity to serve out on the road in the name of the Lord. This journey through the wilderness, through this time of change, needs **you** filled with the Holy Spirit, seeking ways to encourage neighbor, to share a Word from the Lord, to serve for the sake of new life in and for the world God loves.

Life in general right now feels like a gigantic construction site doesn’t it? The routine ways we have traveled in the past are no longer available. Old structures seem to be crumbling and new structures are not yet built. We aren’t clear exactly where we are going or how to get there. We stand overwhelmed and grumble about the lack of leadership, and leaders cry out “I am not able to carry all this alone, this is too heavy for me.”

Hear the good news: God speaks, the Spirit is sent and rests upon the people. Empowered by the Holy Spirit we become workers/helpers on the journey within and towards new life in Christ.

As I walked through the Essentia hallways, very focused on my own health and appointment, it took me a while to realize that I had the opportunity to do more than be helped by those around me. I was extremely grateful for the employee that handed me a map with directions, for the woman in the elevator who affirmed I was indeed headed toward the right floor, the man who led the way down the new skywalk hallway. But, in time I realized I had the opportunity to not only receive but to give. I was empowered to serve, to encourage, to share in the leading. Seeing the father with child in tow, head swiveling I asked “Looking for peds? This elevator, third floor.” Seeing the man in the wheelchair whose aid had wandered away “Would you like a ride to the registration window?” Opportunities abounded to support one another through the construction.

We as Lutherans say we live in the paradox of “the Now and the Not Yet.” Jesus has come, we have been saved and yet we do not yet experience the fulfillment of the kingdom of God. We are sealed with the Holy Spirit to live into this new life in Christ, working for the healing and reconciliation of all creation. In this wilderness land, this construction area, we are called to be more than receivers who grumble for leaders to bring about new and more enjoyable life. We are called, gathered, equipped and sent to serve others on the journey, to bring a word from the Lord. We get out of our own heads, our own self-concern, out of the role of receiver and, filled with the Spirit, we see the needs around us, get outside of ourselves and give what we are able for the good of all. We proclaim a word from the Lord.

God does not abandon us in wilderness times. Jesus walks with us, constructing new life. The Spirit fills us, strengthening us for the journey. We carry the load together, an army of workers and people seeking opportunities to live filled with the Holy Spirit.

“Do you know where you are going? Can I help you on your way?”

“Follow me, I’m going that way as well” or “We can be lost and found together.”