

Step Out Of Your Boat

When I was a pastor in Lewisburg, several of the local churches decided to do a pulpit exchange and I ended up preaching at one of the Lutheran churches in the community. What was nice is that they only had one service, so I didn't have to be at the church early. From my first Sunday as a pastor in Altoona through today, I have always preached at two services and so have spent all of Sunday morning at the church. That Sunday I didn't have to be at the church until 10:30, so in the middle of the morning I was driving through town and I was struck immediately by how many people were out and about. Stores were busy, people were out with their families, lots of cars were on the road, and I honestly thought to myself - what are they all doing? It's Sunday morning.

I realized in that moment that I had been living in a pretty tight "church bubble" for a long time. Obviously, I knew that people did other things on Sunday morning than go to worship, but it kind of startled me to see it all taking place. Living in this "church bubble", it can be easy for us to think that God is only at work when we are together for worship, or that God is only teaching us when we are together for Bible Study and prayer. We often compartmentalize our lives and think that God can only work here, and that He is only working in us, but this is simply not true.

Now to be clear, when we do gather for worship or study, prayer or fellowship, online or in person, God is present, and God is working through the Holy Spirit in some very important and specific ways. In fact, Jesus said that every time two or more gather in His name, He is there. But we can never forget that while we come together to be fed, and filled, and equipped by God, God is also at work in the world preparing others to receive what it is that we have to offer. God was working in everyone on the streets of Lewisburg that day, and God is working in people every day.

This has been the story of the church since day 1. **Acts 2:1-4.** *When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting.*

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They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

This is the birth of the church. The followers of Jesus had come together, and the Holy Spirit was present in that moment with power. The Holy Spirit gave them the ability to speak in other languages and it gave them boldness to trust in Jesus. They came together and were filled with power, God was at work in that room, but God was also at work outside the room.

*Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken... Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "What does this mean?" **Acts 2:5-6, 12.***

God was at work doing two important things outside of that upper room that day, He not only gathered people together from all over the world but God gathered them outside the door where the followers of Jesus were staying. When the Holy Spirit moved the church out from the upper room to where the people were, God then stirred up the hearts of the people so that they started asking questions. *What does this mean? What is going on? We want to know more?* God not only prepared the church to share the good news of Jesus, but God also gathered and prepared the people to be present to hear that good news. They were gathered together and ready to listen. On the day of Pentecost, God was just as active outside the church as he was inside the church.

Today God is just as active outside the church as God is inside the church. God is at work gathering people together and stirring up the hearts and minds of people in all our communities so that they are ready to receive all that the church has to offer. The question is do we really believe that this is happening?

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A pastor in Sweden told the story of a man who showed up at their church one Sunday. The Muslim man had recently arrived in Sweden after fleeing some of the worn torn areas of Syria. In a dream, he saw an auditorium filled with people who all had their hands raised in the air. He had that dream several nights in a row so decided to ask people what it meant. No one could tell him what his dream meant but they did say that he should probably go to Stockholm because that is where there are many large auditoriums. So, he went to Stockholm, and when he got off the train in the city, the very first person he saw told him he got off at the wrong station. Now understand, he had not asked the man where he was, he hadn't said anything to him, the man just went up and told him he needed to go back one stop.

Not knowing what else to do, the man got on a train and went back one stop. This time he got off and went up to the first person he saw and he told him about his dream. That person said, well that sounds like Word of Life Church which is right down the street. The man found the church and since it was Sunday, the doors were open. He walked in and saw hundreds of people standing with their hands in the air - just like in his dream - they were worshipping God. He stayed around and heard the gospel presented and on that day he accepted Jesus as his savior. The church then realized that thousands of Muslims were entering their country and were looking for hope and support so maybe God was stirring up more of them to hear about Jesus. They began an outreach ministry that has not only helped thousands of Muslims but drawn many of them to Jesus.

Too many times we think the Holy Spirit is only moving in us when we are together for worship, or that the Holy Spirit is only working in us as we try to learn more about our faith, but what if we really believed that the Holy Spirit was just as active - even more active - outside the church and outside of us than inside? What if we truly believed that every time we came together for worship, study, prayer, or fellowship we knew beyond any doubt that God was working to prepare one person, 10 people, 100 people to receive all that we had to offer them in Jesus' name. What if every morning we got up and

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said to ourselves, God is preparing someone today for me to share my faith with, for me to love, and care for?

From the other perspective, let me tell you a story of when I found myself one of those people that God was preparing. 40 years ago this month I walked onto the campus of MSU. I didn't know anyone in the state of MI let alone at MI State. My roommate never showed up so on move-in day I sat in my room alone and waited. All day. The days didn't improve very much, and I found myself pretty lost and alone. I began to wonder if I had made a huge mistake.

At the registration area for freshmen, there were tables set up for all the different campus groups you could join. One large sign said InterVarsity, so I kept on walking assuming it had something to do with sports. As I headed back to my dorm room, I again questioned the wisdom of leaving CT to attend MSU. It was that very afternoon I got the letter.

Cindy was a high school friend of mine and we had been in youth group together for 4 years. She told me that her sister had gone to MSU years early and was part of a great Christian group called InterVarsity and that I should check it out. I had literally just seen that sign, so I went back and talked to Gary and Ruth Abbot who invited me to the first meeting which was being held - guess when? - that night. I went that night and met other freshmen from my dorm complex who invited me to hang out with them and eat with them. I joined a Bible Study and in so many ways that one day changed my life. God was just as active outside of that IV group, preparing me to hear all that God had for me, as He was inside.

If God is always working through the Holy Spirit to prepare us to share and give while also working to stir up the hearts of other people to listen and receive, then what do we need to do? The first thing we have to do is **Believe that the Holy Spirit is at work**. We have to trust that God is doing exactly what God said He would do, which is to be with us, and to prepare us for God's purpose. Jesus promised

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that when He left this world He would send someone who would be with us forever.

John 14:16 *I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever.*

That Advocate is the Holy Spirit and Jesus said the Holy Spirit would prepare us and teach us all we need to know.

John 14:26. *The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*

And the Holy Spirit does all of this so we can share what we know with others.

Matthew 10:18-20 *you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles. But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.*

Jesus was clear that the Holy Spirit would always be with us and give us the wisdom we need and the boldness we need to share God's love with others. All around us there are people whose hearts have been stirred up and are longing to hear what it is we have to share. They are hurting and need comfort. They are in despair and need hope. They are living in darkness and need the light of Christ. While many times we don't feel adequate to share God's love or any message of hope, the truth is that God not only prepares us to share but He is stirring up the world to listen.

If we believe this is true, then we need to **Step out of our boat**. In Matthew 14, Jesus sent the disciples ahead of Him in a boat while he dismissed the crowds and got a few minutes alone with God. He then went to join the disciples by walking across the lake on the water. When the disciples saw Him they were terrified because, as

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experienced fishermen, they knew that no one could walk on water. They knew that what they saw was not possible, but Jesus called out to them, and then Jesus invited Peter to step out of the boat and walk with Him.

I have always loved this story and I thought about it as we sailed on the very still waters of the Sea of Galilee. What's important to think about when we read this story is that Peter didn't get out of his boat to walk on the water until after Peter had invited Jesus into his boat to be with him. You see, months earlier, Jesus was walking along the shores of the Sea of Galilee and the crowds were so large that he asked Peter if he could get into his boat to use it as a floating stage. Peter invited Jesus into his boat, he invited Jesus into his life, and that began a relationship that grew in faith and trust until finally Jesus said, *OK Peter, now it's time to get out of your boat and walk with me.*

For us, that boat represents all that is safe and secure in our lives. It is what we are comfortable doing and who we are comfortable being. Before we can move beyond what is comfortable, we have to first invite Jesus into our lives and prepare ourselves for the day when we are called to go beyond what is comfortable. Inviting Jesus into our lives means believing that the Holy Spirit is at work in us every day to prepare us for God's purpose and plan. It's believing that God is working in us, but also in the world around us, so that when we step out of our boat, we will be able to do all that God wants us to do.

If you are with us today, the Holy Spirit is at work in you. God is preparing you for something, for some purpose, and a plan that God has for you. Do you believe this? Do you really believe this? Do you believe it enough that when the opportunity to act comes, you will step out beyond what is comfortable and into the life God has for you? Can you believe this?

And what about us as Faith Church, as the community gathered together, do we believe that every time we come together God is preparing us. Do we believe that God has been preparing us for years,

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generations really, for this day, and that while the Holy Spirit is at work in us, the Spirit is also at work in our community? Where is God gathering groups of people all around us who are ready to hear what we have to share and ready to experience the life we have to offer? God is stirring up the hearts of people around us, will we share Christ with them? Do we believe this enough to step out of our boat and walk on the water? Where is God calling us to go?

This week, let's ask God to move us beyond what is comfortable and easy and trust that He has not only prepared us to share what we have but that God has also prepared those around us to receive it with joy. Let's step out of our boat and walk on the water.