

Text: Luke 3L 15-17; 21-22 Acts 8:14-17
Title: the Holy Spirits and Public Ministry

Date: January 10, 2010

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NiddOorCzfE>

So, what did you think of our friend Charlie Parker? In his Dodge ball as a spiritual gift he betrays some of the most common misconceptions about spiritual gifts and ministry in general. First of course is that a spiritual gifts is anything that you do. Say that it is for God and Presto- Change-o, it is a spiritual gift! Or if we can label it with some sort of lame spiritual sounding label, that's OK too. **Do Outstanding Deeds Go Everywhere Be All** as an acronym for Dodgeball? That's so bad that it is good! But of course, that is the point: spiritual gifts are given to every Christian for the purpose of building up the church. Each one of us- but we will get to that a little bit later.

Today is the day we Ordain and Install elders and deacons. Part of our process is the laying on of hands. And if you thought there were some whacked ideas about spiritual gifts, you haven't seen nothing yet. My favorite is the notion of Apostolic Succession. For those traditions that have bishops- they claim that Jesus appointed the 12 Apostles and they in turn appointed their successors. So, in a long uninterrupted line, traceable to the original 12, Bishops are believed to have authority to do ministry. Their authority is not always the equal of the 12 (I think Popes are seen as equal) but their authority is legitimized through them.

Of course, this idea makes no sense on the face of it. A long unbroken line going back to Peter? Where does anyone get that idea- there is nothing in the biblical or historical record to suggest that. Actually, the function of the Apostolic Succession is not to confer authority to do ministry – it is to legitimize those in authority. If a person's authority to do ministry is dependent upon my say so, that concentrates power in my hands, or into the hands of the institution.

Remember last week when we said that we are an anti clerical tradition? This is where we are coming from. Authority to do ministry is not dependent upon any human institution. Authority and ability to do ministry comes from the Holy Spirit. Which brings us to our Luke passage.

Jesus' baptism by John is recorded in all four of the Gospels. Which it should be because it is the opening act of Jesus' public ministry. Everyone agrees that John looks like the prototypical Old Testament- a man sent from God to challenge the leadership that had strayed from the Covenant and to call for change from those in authority. In John's case, that will result in Herod arresting him as a political prisoner and eventually to his death. But John also ignited the long simmering hope that the Messiah was near. Luke has the people (not the powers that be) ask if he might be the One they had been waiting for 200 years. John wasn't the Messiah, he made that clear. The Messiah would bring with him a cleansing that was powered by the Holy Spirit.

So Jesus comes to be baptized. Jesus doesn't come to be baptized in repentance- for as one who is fully human and fully divine- he has nothing to repent from. Other Gospels record that John balked- but that is not the issue that Luke wants to explore. He focuses, not on Jesus getting dunked in the Jordan, but on the Holy Spirit coming in bodily form like a dove. This is not a psychotically moment, seen only by Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes in a form that all can see. This is a PUBLIC anointing, God publically giving Jesus authority to act. As if to underscore this, a voice came out of heaven. The rabbis had this notion of a *bat kohl*- a heavenly voice that would settle theological arguments. In this case, the voice from the heavens is proclaiming who Jesus is.

We get our notion of laying on of hands from passages like this. God's people have been laying on hands on each other, recognizing God's ability and authority to minister in his name from almost the beginning. In both Deuteronomy 34 and Numbers 27, Moses lays hands on Joshua, transferring his authority to publically lead to him in the presence of the people and the priests. In Acts, the leadership of the church lay hands on Paul and Barnabas, commissioning them on their missionary journey. In Joshua's, Paul's and Barnabas' case, the laying on of hands was a public recognition that the Holy Spirit had already empowered and called them to a particular ministry.

In our Acts passage this morning, the Jerusalem church, on hearing that the Gospel was going great guns in Samaria- that pseudo pagan city to the north- they sent Peter and John to investigate.

Now there is nothing magic about the laying on of hands. In Joshua, Paul and Barnabas' case, the laying on of hands was a public recognition that God has ALREADY gifted them and called them into a particular ministry. As with anything pertaining to God, prayer is the key that unlocks the door. Even at Jesus' baptism, the Holy Spirit wasn't obvious until Jesus had prayed. In Acts, the church prayed for the outwards presence of the Holy Spirit to be obvious. After prayer, they laid hands and the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit was obvious to all- to the point where a magician named Simon wanted to know how he could get in on the act- but that is the next verse.

The real downside to traditions that claim that public ministry is limited to only those who have been approved and had hands laid upon is that it takes away from the Reformation ideal of the Priesthood of All Believers. That is, ALL of us are called to love and care for others in Christ's name. which is another reason we ordain laypeople!

And so we come to ordination and installation. With prayer and the voice of this congregation, we have recognized these people to have certain gifts and talents for ministry. We are setting them aside for particular service- some as deacons and some as elders. But this in no way get us each off the hook for looking for ways to develop and exercise our own spiritual gifts.

One of the goals that we will have for this year is to develop a give to and get back mentality. Like the human heart, God has designed the church to be a place where the lifeblood of the Holy Spirit flows and is made obvious to all. And like the human heart, if there is a blockage- bad things happen – and fast. So we will be urging each of us to find a place to plug in, a place to invest ourselves in the ministry of the church. But giving-without getting is a sure recipe for burnout. Even worse, if I do not put myself in a place where I am ministered to as well – then I wind up denying someone else the opportunity to serve and to experience the power of the Holy Spirit in their own lives!

So I urge you, take advantage of the opportunities we currently have:

GET INVOLVED

1. Help with Kids Club - Wednesdays 5:30 - CONTACT: Julie Hoffman
(marjuliowa@msn.com)

2. Cook dinner for Youth Group (BREAK OUT) - Sundays 6pm - CONTACT:
Lynne Masters (pnlmasters@att.net)

3. Volunteer to be the liturgist at 11am - SIGN UP SHEET IN THE NARTHEX

GET BACK

1. Attend adult bible study - Sunday 10am in the Hearth Room

2. Take your kids to Sunday School - Sunday 10am in the Christian Education
Room

Let us pray