

Pentecost 28B Spirit of Promise
Peace, Seattle
November 15, 2015
1 Samuel 1:4-20, Mark 13:1-8

SPIRIT OF PROMISE

One theme, two images from our texts on this Spirit of Promise Sunday.

From 1st Samuel, the story of Hannah, whose soulful laments and prayers for a child are heard at last. Pregnancy turns her longing into rejoicing, and she bears a son—Samuel—who in time will anoint David King, ushering in Israel’s Golden Age.

Few things can compare to the quickened pulse of heart and hope when we learn a new child is coming into our lives. And yet, depending the timing of the news and life circumstances, the promise of new birth can also usher in a whole lot of anxiety, fear, and wondering what the future holds. Nothing does more to unsettle settled lives than a baby.

And that’s where our gospel picks up.

Sandwiched between confrontations with Temple leaders and the events leading to his arrest, chapter 13 of Mark collects Jesus’ prophecies and warnings to his followers that the world as they know it, is about to come apart at the seams.

Standing in the shadow of the Temple with their mouths agape—like country bumpkins on their first trip to the big city—Jesus’ disciples can’t help but be impressed at what they see.

TEACHER! THIS IS AWESOME! THESE BUILDINGS, THESE STONES!

But Jesus, who throughout Mark’s gospel has hammered away at the Temple as a system wildly out of plumb with God’s reign, cuts through their reverie, and says: **IT’S ALL COMING DOWN.**

Then in the final verse of our reading, after what sounds for all the world like the most dire predictions the future could hold, Jesus, summing it up, says:

THIS IS THE BEGINNING OF THE BIRTH PANGS.

Birth pangs, labor pains. Using the language of pregnancy and birth Jesus REFRAMES where all this chaos is heading.

Something new will be brought to birth here, he tells them. And if what Jesus is about, what he stands for, ultimately, is LIFE and not DEATH, then the message beneath the words is: we need not fear, we need not be afraid.

For three Sunday we’ve been building on the theme: SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY.

It began with Kathy Peters talking about Peace as a community where loving happens, where caring is real because you can see it being embodied. Peace is a living place—the body of Christ—where generation after generation, at Font and at Table, and through meaningful relationships, we’ve come to see that “Jesus loves me, this I know, for my people show me so.”

Then, last week, Melanie Coulson reminded us that cultivating a SPIRIT OF GIVING within our families and our congregation takes practice. We rehearse that giving every time we offer ourselves in fellowship to each other, every time we give time and energy to ministries here and in the larger community, every time we offer our financial resources to sustain our mission and to touch people within and beyond these doors.

After my story last week about a woman who came to us for help, several of you were moved to make special contributions to the AGAPE FUND, and within one hour, the balance of that fund went from 0.24 cents to over \$1,100 dollars. **How's that for a spirit of giving?!**

This week we're all about the spirit of promise. PROMISE (as Sarah tells us), has to do with... POTENTIAL, with COMMITMENT, and with ACTION.

To borrow the language of our texts, today we're asking:

What is God bringing to birth here?

What is the Spirit midwifing among us, and what might our faithful response look like?

This afternoon, our confirmation class will be heading down to Fauntleroy Creek to the place where the creek has provided nurturing habitat for Coho salmon fry released every year by school children. Even though no Coho have returned so far this year, the place near where the creek approaches the Sound is still a place full of promise.

While we're there, we'll talk about baptism as the headwaters of our spiritual life, the place we first belonged, the place where we get our spiritual bearings within the community of God's people. We'll be reminded that, no matter where life may take us, no matter how far or near the journey, these baptismal waters, like the salmon's natal stream, will always be calling us home.

As citizens of this unique bioregion we're learning more all the time about how our actions and inactions benefit or inhibit the salmon that run through Northwest waters. We're learning that there is something at stake in the choices we make each day about water usage, transportation, how we care for lawns and gardens, and what we can do to contribute to the health of the Sound.

The same could be said about our investment in the life of this community we call Peace.

There's something at stake here when we volunteer for the ministries of our congregation.

There's something at stake when we contribute items for the bazaar or make quilts or dig raingardens, or volunteer at the food bank; there's something at stake when we teach Sunday School or mentor confirmation students, when we dig into God's Word, or serve meals to Mary's Place families or Compass Center men, or any of dozens of other acts of ministry.

And there's something at stake, too, when we jot a figure down on that estimate of giving card because we believe that the Lord is behind the spirit of community we experience here and we want to be part of it, nurture it, invest in it.

Next week, two of our young ones, Mateo Leon-Stephens and Juliana Outlaw will be entering the headwaters of baptism.

Baptism doesn't come with a guarantee that life will be risk free. As much as we might like it to, it doesn't provide us with immunity from life's mistakes, temptations, and challenges.

But in, with, and through this sacred covenant Christ Jesus offers an indelible promise that no experience or circumstance will be able to separate us from him, no force can wrench us from his grasp.

When Jesus looked to the future, he did so with candor, yet he held on to hope, for he knew that, within God's larger unfolding story something new was coming to birth.

When we look into the future of our congregation, we do so with the belief that through the cross and resurrection of Christ there will be new beginnings and new births, even if we must wait to see the shape that they will take.

Such beginnings may, at times, feel like death. And it may mean death—as it does each year for the salmon and will one day for each of us.

But finally all these deaths, whatever their form—even our own—are the birth pangs of God's new creation.

Let us pray.

God of endings and beginnings, you have cultivated a spirit of community in this place we have come to call home, and gifted us with promises that will never fail. As we lean into your promises, inspire us to become as passionately committed to your mission as the salmon homing in on their natal stream. For the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.