

Any of you ever watch Looney Toons? Yes, with Bugs Bunny, Roadrunner, Wiley Coyote, and the Tasmanian Devil. What happened in the episodes when the Tasmanian Devil was let loose in a situation? Utter chaos, complete damage and destruction, other characters ran in fear yelling “Watch out! Get out of the way!”

This is what happens when we open the door of our lives and give space for the devil to enter. Utter chaos, complete damage and destruction, and others (including us eventually) want to run in fear. In true form, the devil isn’t like this on the outside. At first, everything appears good and great and maybe even wonderful until... But be sure to know that eventually the devil will act in true form and do its thing- destruction with the devil is inevitable.

Today’s message from Luke is an invitation for us to consider letting another powerful spirit into our lives- the Holy Spirit- a spirit of power and might, but not for damage and destruction, for putting together and building up- a spirit of hope in faithful promise and providence.

I was reading a section of a commentary this week on this passage from Luke and I really like what Robert Brearly offered. He writes, “Later in scripture, Luke will tell us in the early chapters of Acts how the Holy Spirit came upon the believers at Pentecost and launched the church in witness. Now he is telling us of the Holy Spirit’s involvement in the life of Jesus as he steps forth in public ministry. Even Jesus is not self-sufficient, Luke reveals. He is dependent upon God for life, faith, and mission. This text today is preceded by the brief story of Jesus’ baptism and then the long account of Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness. For Luke, these two as well as what is happening in the synagogue at the moment, are Holy Spirit stories as the Spirit claims, tests, and empowers Jesus for the ministry that lies before him. The Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus like a dove while he is praying after his baptism and speaks the claiming word of affirmation. Then the Holy Spirit fills and leads Jesus into the wilderness for a time of testing as Jesus refuses the pathways that are the wrong choices for his servant ministry. Now as Jesus returns to Galilee, the Holy Spirit will fill him with power for ministry as he reads a text that will be his mission statement as Messiah.”

Luke is clear in his message to reveal that it is the Holy Spirit who leads Jesus in saying “no” to false options in the temptation of the devil as well as the Holy Spirit who leads

Jesus in saying “yes” to a mission that is given to him by God. And if Jesus depends on the Holy Spirit to put his purpose and promise into practice, don’t you think it would be in our best interest and a good thing to depend on the Holy Spirit to fill us and use us to put our purpose and promise into practice?

Think about the context of the early church for a moment. What did it have going for it? Did they have buildings? Did they have budgets? Did they have paid staff? How many members did they have? *The Holy Spirit was the only thing the early church had going for it.* However, the opposite seems to be true for the modern church: we have buildings, budgets, staff, and many members in which to lean and depend. The question this passage in Luke invites is, “What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives and how would we know?”

You, or someone else in the church might ask, “How are we doing as a church?” However, the real question is, “As a church, what are we doing for God?” Jesus steps forward in Nazareth and declares the truth about his life: he has been filled with the power of the Spirit and anointed to bring good news to the poor. To know our mission and to understand what God has given us to do are as important to us as they were to Jesus. The Holy Spirit gives us something to do for God.

Tom Harvey, a Presbyterian missionary in Singapore, preached these words: “Mission catches you up in the life and vitality of God, for it is God who relentlessly draws men and women to himself in love and compassion. Moreover, when we step away from mission, there is a corresponding depletion of the life and vitality in the church.”

As a church, what are we doing for God? Is the church full of life and vitality? Are we being faithful in allowing the Holy Spirit to empower us and guide us from promise to practice?

Here is the thing. We know the power of the Holy Spirit is with us because the Holy Spirit gives us something to do for God and a time to do it. There is a sense of urgency in Jesus’ mission. He finished reading, rolled up the scroll, gave it to the attendant, sat down, and with all eyes on him said, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” The time of God’s Holy Spirit is today, right now. And not just for Strode in the celebration of his baptism, but for all of us as we remember our baptismal vows, for all of us as we gather together to worship God and listen for God’s direction and will upon our lives. This we can know for sure. It is the Holy Spirit speaking when you hear God whisper to you: “Child of God, live this day as if it were your first day, as if it were your last day, as if it were your only day.”

In light of this, we might reflect on how we feel on our first day of new job? Or living in a new city? Or going to a new school? Or becoming a parent? Or taking on a new leadership role and being commissioned?

Eyes wide open? A little terrified but in a good way? Anticipating?
Participating? Willing? Hungry? Feed me more? Let's do this? Nothing can stop me now?

The evolution of a promise can prime us and prepare us for practice in a remarkable way.

An Oath of Office, Ordination Vows, Renunciations, Affirmations of Faith, Contract

For the last few days, congregational leaders put into practice their ordination vows as we met for a retreat. Friday evening and Saturday morning, we spent time together being, praying, affirming- laughing, playing, eating- discerning, discussing, deciding- reviewing, celebrating, aligning. Our focus was being together and allowing the Holy Spirit to fill our time and use us in a way God desired. We spent time in the why, the who, and the what of church ministry and mission. Challenges were expressed, actions moved upon, and expectations clarified. From my eyes, we were able to effectively align leadership roles and expectations between session and staff and other initiative and committee leaders, all while staying focused on the spirit of our task and remaining faithful to God and one another. As our time ended on Saturday, our final minutes together included the consensus that from a leadership perspective, and we want to invite all of you to help with this because when everyone leads, we are more effective, from a leadership perspective **2025 is going to be a year to engage, impact, and expect.** Engage what? Engage who? Impact what? Impact who? You might be asking. Good questions. Jesus said, "Ask and you shall receive." More will be shared, and more specifically more will be experienced, as we get further into 2025, but we invite you to inquire and to do so by asking various leaders how you can be an active part. All are encouraged and welcome!

One day at a time, one opportunity at a time, one gift at a time, one jolt of power from the Holy Spirit at a time, we will unpack our promise to God as a church and strive to live into (practice) our call.

I will close with this... Several years ago, during the celebration of a baptism, it was shared with me that the Holy Spirit descending out of the open heavens during Jesus' baptism was a symbol that God was on the loose. And look what happened with Jesus as God was with him and the power of the Holy Spirit filled him. Look at the miracles and the teachings and the impact he had, and is still having, on so many. What Jesus comes to illustrate for

us is that a life with God on the loose, the Holy Spirit dwelling inside, is a life able to be lived, a life worth living. With the Holy Spirit, we are able to move from promise to practice- and the more God is on the loose in our lives maybe we can say, “Watch out world, God things are coming! Get on the way!”