

## McCabe United Methodist Church

Part 1, Ghost Stories: Tales of Holy Visions & Divine Encounters:  
2017 Summer Series

### *The Spirit of God Is...*

Genesis 1:1-2 (June 17 & 18, 2017)  
Pastor Mark Ehrmantraut

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Let us Pray: Living and Active God, we come to meet you here this morning. May the words of my mouth and the meditations on each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. You are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Last week the United Methodist Church in the Dakotas had our once-a-year meetings called Annual Conference. Junius Dotson preached one day. He said:

*Imagine. Imagine leaving Annual Conference. Imagine getting back to our communities and hearing: 'Hold it, hold it! Don't let them loose in our town. They're turning the world upside down'.*

The Bishop last weekend, he challenged us. He asked: *Are we Pentecostal people? Are we people alive and living in the Spirit?*

Because that's our history. As followers of Jesus, as United Methodists, we are people of the Spirit. We are People of Pentecost.

I share this as we begin our summer series this weekend. Over the summer we'll be working our way through the Bible. We'll be starting in the beginning, and pausing on selected Scriptures where the Spirit of God is active and alive and moving.

We begin this morning in the beginning. Genesis 1:1-2

*In the beginning, God **CREATED** the heavens and the earth. The earth<sup>2</sup> was without form. It was void. Darkness was over the face of the deep. And the **Spirit of God** was hovering over the face of the waters.*

God's Spirit was primed and ready.

God's Spirit was active and moving.

God's Spirit was ready to create something new, and to turn things upside down.

And that's exactly what happened.

*<sup>3</sup> God said, "Let there be light," and there was light, and <sup>4</sup> God saw that the light was good.*

Can you picture it? The Spirit stirring, penetrating the darkness with light.

What does that even mean? God separating the light from the darkness. Would that be like trying to take food coloring out of the water? Would that be like trying to unbake a cookie?

But the Spirit of God wasn't done, because, then, God created the Heavens by reaching in and pulling the heavens up out of the water. And in the process God created dry land.

And The Spirit kept moving. The Spirit of God forced the vegetation to burst from the ground. The Spirit of God created the seasons and the sun and the moon.

And the Spirit of God wasn't done. There were winged birds, and fish, and all sorts of living creatures.

And then, God's Spirit kept creating something new. Human beings... Human beings to have dominion over the earth.

It's beautiful and wonderful and good. Yet it's also a daunting undertaking.

So on the 7<sup>th</sup> day, God saw the beautiful and good, and God rested.

Friends, when the Spirit of God moves, it can be exhilarating and energizing.

When the Spirit of God moves, it can feel like we better strap on our crash helmets because things might get turned upside down.

Martha Grace Reese writes:

*Are you living a faith that makes you want to strap on a helmet in the morning, because living your faith, you're going on an adventure that can turn things upside down.*

I walked into a coffee shop earlier this week.

I saw a poster.

It was today's Scripture:

It was a cool poster.

It had a serene outdoor scene of God's creation for the background.

As I thought about the poster I wondered...

It's a beautiful picture. A calm lake. Rugged mountains and steep cliffs.

There were towering trees and rich green grass strewn with flowers.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. Thank you, God...



I got to thinking... When the Spirit of God cut those canyons, when the tectonic plates heaved against each other forcing the mountains to rise up, when the Spirit of God infused and commanded the trees to burst through the soil and rise up, this isn't necessarily a calm, peaceful image. In many ways, this scene claims the power and the tension that comes with living with an ***unleashed*** Spirit of God.

In the beginning God CREATED the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and it was filled with darkness, and the Spirit of God was hovering. The Spirit of God was active and moving, ready to create, and ready to turn things upside down when necessary.

This Spirit of God can speak in a soft gentle whisper. Yet this same Spirit of God, it rushes like the wind and laps flames upon our heads.

The Spirit of God comforts us and convicts us. The Spirit of God reassures us and it drives us to our knees.

In the beginning, the Spirit of God was hovering and creating and forcing the atoms and the molecules to come together and to separate.

Friends, when the Spirit of God is stirring, and when we join in, strap your helmets on, because we may in for quite a ride. Things may even get turned upside down.

The Holy Spirit leads people to faith. It doesn't matter what kind of baggage we come with. It doesn't matter how much we're hurting and broken. The Holy Spirit seeks us and pursues us.

The Holy Spirit works on us and works through us.

The Holy Spirit can even work despite us.

This is the same Spirit that breathed the breath of life into the earliest man and woman.

This is the same Spirit that rose Jesus from the dead.

This is the same Spirit that meets us here in worship this morning...

And we're not done yet...

This is the same Spirit that lives in you and me!

How do we even wrap our minds around that?

The Spirit of God **WAS** active and alive.

The Spirit of God **IS** active and alive.

The Spirit of God **WILL BE** active and alive wherever we go.

The question before us is: Will we join with the moving, creating Spirit, even if we need helmets?

Will we join with the Spirit even if things get turned upside down?

Annie Dillard writes,

*"Do you have any idea of what kind of power we so casually invoke? [We, the church...] Too often we're like little children playing on the floor with a chemistry set. We play with our chemistry sets, mixing up chemicals. We casually play. Then, before we know it, without realizing it, we've mixed up a batch of explosives. It's like we're playing with dynamite here."*<sup>1</sup>

She writes that it's madness that we're comfortable wearing straw hats and penny loafers to church.

Instead, we should be wearing crash helmets and heavy boots. Ushers should be handing out life jackets and signal flares. We should be seat belted and strapped into the pews.

This is the same Spirit that immediately after Jesus was baptized, this Spirit came upon him and drove him into the wilderness. Led by the Spirit, thrust into the wilderness, filled with the Spirit, Jesus persevered through the challenges. Jesus overcame the challenges. And Filled with the Spirit, Jesus fed the hungry and cared for the poor and healed the sick.

We're talking about healing people who hadn't walked for decades.

We're talking about a woman hemorrhaging for years.

Jesus spit in his hand, rubbed it in the dirt, and smeared the mud in a guy's eyes so the man might see.

But it wasn't just physical healing was it?

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<sup>1</sup> Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk : Expeditions and Encounters*, Paperback edition (2013) from Harper Perennial

It was forgiving sin no one else would go near.

It was loving the man and woman everyone else rejected.

It was healing those deepest, darkest wounds everyone else judged and condemned.

This is crash helmet theology!

This stuff turns the world upside down!

And it's as relevant today as ever...

Look around our neighborhoods, friends. We have neighbors sleeping on mattresses on the floor.

More weekends than not, we have brothers and sisters in Christ, worshipping at McCabe who might not want to fill in an attendance folder. At that particular moment, they might not have a consistent physical address.

We can look inside our own hearts. We're broken. We need forgiveness. We need healing.

We fight about money and politics.

We judge one another and belittle those who have different ideas than us.

I think the bishop said last weekend, yeah, Jesus calmed the storms. But the reality is, Jesus also caused plenty of storms. In fact, it wasn't uncommon that where Jesus was, the storms were raging.

Friends, when the Spirit is active and moving, it's a good sign for us to strap on our helmets because things may get turned upside down.

A friend dropped by the church this week to drop off this program. It had a note attached. I'll read it.

The note said:

*This is the program I was handed the night of your ordination. When I opened it and saw it was upside down I couldn't help but smile. You've shared how your life was turned around possibly upside down when you accepted God's call... SURPRISE!!*

They concluded: Just thought you might want this copy as a reminder to be ready for anything!

Friends, We are People of Pentecost.

Living in the Spirit, we need to be ready for anything.

So I'd like to invite you to strap on your crash helmet.

I'd like to invite you to join with the Spirit that is active and moving right here through McCabe.

And as we prepare to go into the world, may the people who see us coming smile and say:

Hold it!! Hold it!! Don't let them loose in our town. These people are filled with the Spirit. They turn the world upside down!

Let's Pray...

Holy and Mighty God, we come this morning awake and alive in your Spirit. Pour out your grace and mercy upon us. Breakthrough and drive us into the future. When we need comfort, may we find comfort. When we need to be convicted, convict us. Protect us and unleash. Where you lead us may we follow. Yes God, continue to prod us and transform us so we may be your instruments. Use us to help turn the world upside down. We pray in the powerful name of your Son Jesus. Amen.