

**Banner series 3: *Go with the Spirit***  
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**January 22, 2017**

**Exodus 14:10-18**  
**Acts 16:6-10**  
**Matthew 10:17-20, 26-31**

As I think of our topic for today, "Go with the Spirit," I am reminded of the old spiritual. It starts like this:

Children, go where I send thee!  
How shall I send thee?

And there it is. God says, "Go!" And we say, "How?" *Children, go where I send thee!* But where?, you ask. And how do I know? Well, that's what we're going to explore today, through Scripture and by the Spirit's leading, as we finish Part 3 in our Banner series.

This series, as most of you know, is based on our congregational vision. Tell me what that is! (*Know the Father, Grow as Jesus' disciples, Go with the Spirit.*) Yes: *know, grow, go.* We have said that because God is our Father, we want to know him – really *know* him, not just *about* him. To be in relationship with him through prayer, Bible study and worship. Further, Jesus, the Son, is the Lord who saves. That's what the name "Jesus" means, as we learned last week. Jesus made our relationship with God possible through his death and resurrection. He has saved us from the consequences of sin; forgiven us; and opened the door to eternal life. He has called you to follow him, as you invite other followers along the way. Now we hear that the Holy Spirit sends you out, giving direction, faith, power – and results. That's what we're going to talk about today. *Go with the Spirit!*

Now, you might say, "You know, Pastor Judy, the Father – I get. Jesus – I get. But the Holy Spirit has always been a little harder to wrap my mind around." I get that. So let me give you an image that might help you out. Think of the Holy Spirit as an action word. *Spirit*, in the biblical languages (both Hebrew and Greek) is the same word as the one used for *breath* and *wind*. So think of the Holy Spirit in terms of the action of breathing – breathing life into you. Or wind – blowing you in the direction God wants you to go. It's movement, it's activity, it's life.

Let's stick with the image of wind for a moment. Think of your life as a boat, and the world as the ocean. Without wind, you are adrift; you are caught in whatever current comes along. (Right?) The wind of the Spirit will give you direction; he will blow you to safe haven. But to catch the wind, you need sails on your boat. Those sails are faith, prayer, Bible study, worship, Christian fellowship. The Holy Spirit blows into these sails, giving you both direction and power. The more sails on your boat, the more the Holy Spirit can lead and direct your life. Otherwise you will drift; you will capsize in a storm. But the Holy Spirit breathes life into you. He speaks to you through God's word. He blows purpose into your life and sends you in the right direction. And finally, he brings you into safe harbor. Scripture calls the Holy Spirit *Counselor* and *Helper, Advocate*. Jesus says the Spirit will convince you of the truth; Paul says the Spirit prays for you with sighs and groans too deep for words. Did you know that you cannot even believe that Jesus is Lord, without the Holy Spirit? He gives you faith. Think of the Holy Spirit as an action word, the wind that fills your sails, the breath that gives you life.

The Holy Spirit gives you direction. You need direction because life is full of questions. I believe, but how shall I live out my faith? Where can I serve best? How can I use my gifts to honor God in all my life? Decisions do need to be made, and sometimes it's hard to know where to turn. How will the Holy Spirit direct you?

You remember Moses' story. God called him to lead his people out of Egypt, out of slavery, out from under the iron hand of Pharaoh. An impossible task, humanly speaking. But take a look at our lesson for this morning. By his own hand, by his own power, God had convinced Pharaoh to let his people go, and finally the day came. They got as far as the Red Sea before Pharaoh began to regret his decision. He sent his army to go after them and bring them back. So there the Israelites were, caught between a rock and a hard place – the Red Sea billowing before them and Pharaoh's army, bearing down behind them. There wasn't much time for dithering. But first, God had to deal with their fear, their lack of faith. Moses told the people, "Stand firm. Trust God, and he will fight for you." Then God told Moses to lead them forward. "Move on!" God said. "What are you standing around for? Get going!" And God blew a path through the sea and saved his people, while the Egyptian army that followed, was drowned in the waves. Such is the power of God!

*Stand firm* in your faith! Don't let your circumstances cause you to panic; remember who God is. The Israelites had seen God's power through the plagues, the pillars of cloud and fire, in the parting of the Red Sea. The Exodus is the defining story of salvation in the history of the Jews, pointing to the greater story of salvation in Christ. Moses led them out of slavery to Egypt; Jesus led us out of slavery to sin and death. Powerful! So don't be afraid of life's storms. Trust God. He has acted before. He will do so again.

*Stand firm!* And then, *move on!* Sometimes there is only one way to go. For Moses, it was the path through the sea. For Paul, it was the call to Macedonia. Paul and his fellow missionaries were preaching the Gospel in Asia (modern-day Turkey). They would stop in towns and cities along the way, find a synagogue or a market-place -- wherever people gathered -- and start telling them about Jesus. But this time, God closed doors. Every inland path was blocked, and so finally they ended up on the northwest coast of Turkey at Troas, looking across the water at Greece and Macedonia. There Paul dreamed of a man from Macedonia calling from across the water. Understanding that this dream was of the Holy Spirit, they got on a boat and for the first time, landed on the shores of Europe, there to spread the Gospel to a new continent. When there is only one path open to you, *move on!* Trust God and go.

Now, for Moses and Paul, the Spirit's direction was obvious. There was only one way to go. But for you and me, it may not always be so obvious. Philip Yancey, Christian journalist and writer, has struggled with this problem. He tells of the time when he was making a career choice while working for the *Campus Life* magazine. Two options were presented to him: business manager or writer. He enjoyed both; he had gifts for both; both offered him similar rewards. So he prayed, but he received no direct guidance. Instead, the guidance he received was subtle and indirect, and which became clear only in hindsight.

You know what it was? It was insomnia. Over a period of months, he began to notice a trend. On the days/weeks when he was working on the business side, he couldn't sleep. But when he

was writing, he slept like a baby. Finally making the connection, he concluded that the Spirit was leading him to the writing job, and the rest is history. He says that looking back – the direction given him was striking and clear; but it didn't feel that way at the time. Yancey concludes: "I had always thought of guidance as forward-looking. Yet in my own experience I have found the direction to be reversed. For me, guidance only becomes clear as I look backward. As for the present, my focus must be my relationship to God. Am I responding with obedience and trust?"

*Trust.* There it is again. Jesus told his disciples when he sent them out: you will meet with opposition. *But don't be afraid!* He says that 3 times in this reading alone. He goes on: "I will give you the words to speak just when you need them." And I can tell you this for sure: Jesus always makes good on his promise. Trust in him.

*Stand firm in your faith. Move on when God tells you. And trust in God* – he is there for you. But, you say, I'm sorry but I really need some specifics. Can you give me some concrete indicators? How do I know when and where the Spirit is leading? When Pastor Jim and I were presented with the opportunity to serve overseas, we had a difficult decision to make. We already had good jobs, a house of our own (that is, together with the bank), and three small children. Should we give up our jobs and home and face the unknown – with three little kids? Where there were poverty and malaria and who-knows-what? Three concrete questions helped us as we sought the Spirit's guiding.

*First, what was our heart's desire?* From the beginning of our relationship, our heart's desire was to serve overseas. Even before Jim and I went out on our first date, he asked me whether I would consider going overseas as a missionary. That's how strong the desire was! It was because of a shared desire to serve on the mission field that Jim left a good engineering job to go to seminary. I switched majors from Spanish to nursing, feeling that the latter would serve me better wherever we were. Serving in missions overseas was our heart's desire.

*Second, did our skills match up?* Would we actually be useful there? We inventoried our skills, and compared them to positions offered through our church mission board. In Tanzania they were looking for a pastor and Bible teacher. The initial call was for Jim; I just went along as wife and mom. But God put us both to work, and we developed more skills as needed. It was on the mission field that I was called and equipped to become a pastor. Who knew? It sure wasn't on my radar screen.

So we had a desire and skills to match. God equipped us where we fell short. *Third, did others confirm this call?* The answer in our case was yes – by many, including former missionaries and seminary professors. We were screened by the mission board and given the ok. We were so glad to have this outside confirmation. Because there were times when we wondered whether we were really cut out to be missionaries. Without question, there were others who would have done it better. But perhaps – we were the ones willing to go. Sometimes God takes what he can get and makes it work. Heart's desire; skill sets; confirmation of call by others. That gives you some concrete indicators to work with.

So, as Pastor Dan has done each week: I'm going to give you some homework. In review (this is important) he has told you that for this *year*, take 5 minutes in prayer, 5 minutes in Bible study, 5 days a week. (If you are already there, go the next level!) For this *month*, identify one person who doesn't yet know Jesus. Pray for that person, seeking one encounter with him. And find one way to encourage that person in faith. Here's my homework assignment: it's for *today*. Sit down at the table with paper and pen, seeking God in prayer. Write down these three things, as you seek the Spirit's direction for service and mission:

1. What is my heart's desire?
2. What skills do I have that match that desire; or can I find the means to get equipped?
3. Is there outside confirmation – not from yourself – but from others that this is the way for you to go?

Do it today. And when you find that direction – whether to stay or to change course – *stand firm* in your faith. *Move on!* And *trust* that God is with you.

Friends, you are children of the Father. He loves you and has made you his own. You are disciples of Jesus, saved by his grace without deserving it. And you are missionaries, sent by the Spirit. Yes, you! Your mission may not be overseas; it may not require a move or a change in career. But as disciples you are sent out on mission, going with the Spirit, to serve others. In so doing, you will minister with God's love and compassion, in his power, reaching out in ways you never thought possible. And he will manage the outcome. It is the Spirit who brings results. Our job is like the song says: *Go where I send thee!*

*Know, Grow, Go.* God *is* with us – that's his promise. Together, we have work to do. Life-changing, world-changing work. Let's go. (Prayer)