

Something New is Happening

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - April 4, 2021
(Drawing from Eugene Peterson's writing on the New Testament)

When we consider the origins of the Christian Church, we often look to the book of Acts 1 & 2, but there is a parallel with Luke 1 & 2. God brought our Savior into the world and the Church into the world by the same method, by the descent of the Dove. The Holy Spirit descended into the womb of Mary, then thirty or so years later the same Holy Spirit descended into men and women, which included Mary. These men and women were followers of Jesus. This happened as they were at worship during the Jewish feast of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem. The first miracle of conception gave us Jesus: *God to the rescue*; the second miracle paralleled it in the conception of the Church.

The beginning of the Christian Church was a miracle that didn't look like a miracle, a miracle in the form of the powerless, the vulnerable, and unimportant of their day. These were people in some ways not so different from us when we consider our place on the stage of history. The Church, both the early church and our church, is a continuation of the biggest story of the year, of history: Jesus' reconciling story.

In another parallel, Luke's telling of the story of the early church in Acts replicates the story of Jesus under Roman occupation in Luke. The early church had no power in

Rome, just as Jesus didn't come for political power, yet His Gospel did indeed reach and change Rome. This is the same Jesus' reconciling story that is lived out in our churches today, whether a Christian church in a democracy, autocracy, or a Christian church today in communist country. The same Jesus' reconciliation story is being lived and told today, though we might not notice immediately. Though not immediately seen, we are all being reconciled in Jesus by the same Holy Spirit who descended on Mary and the early church.

This is not a fast story, by the way. We don't get daily updates, like we do for other world events. The story of the Church happens in small ways: in acts of kindness, steps of faith, all on a foundation of knowing and receiving God's love. As we slowly take in Jesus' story together, as we take each other in with grace, we begin realizing, even embracing, what the Holy Spirit has created in the Church.

When we take a long look, a long loving look at our congregation, we see people being slowly formed by the Holy Spirit, people who make us smile, people who have forgiven us, people who have gifted us with joy, and slowly we all are being reconciled in Jesus. Stop the presses, call the editor, for we are a new creation within the world and this is the lead story. Through the Holy Spirit and His reconciling ministry, this is how God chooses to be present to the world.

Now this may all seem like kinda old news for those of us who have been around the church for a while. Yet this is also eternal news. This won't be reported tonight on the Evening News. Yes, Easter Bunny celebrations may have their half minute, but descending from heaven the Holy Spirit who fills us with joy, who brings about reconciliation, will be the lead story. When we consider the lead story on the stage of history: Jesus is there, at the center!

I like this quote I'm adapting from Eugene Peterson's *Nahum* introduction in the *Message*,

The stage of history is large. Larger-than-life figures appear on this stage from time to time, swaggering about, brandishing weapons and money, terrorizing and bullying. These figures are not, as they suppose themselves to be, at the center of the stage. The fact is they're not anywhere near the center. At any moment in history a few superpower nations and their rulers dominate the daily news. But few of these names make a mark of immortality. The danger is that the noise of these pretenders-to-power distract us from what is going on quietly at the center of the stage in the action and person of Jesus.

Jesus' characteristic way of working is in quietness and prayer. If we conditionally respond to noise and size, we will miss God's Word and action. So, God often assigns someone to pay attention to some of these persons,

*nations or movements just long enough to get us to focus back to the main action: **Jesus!***

There is a lot that gathers our attention throughout each week, a lot of people on the world stage desperately want our attention. Yet the Bible brings us back to center stage. Jesus is at the center. Reconciliation is at the heart of the universe and it is necessary that we join in. God's long-range plan is that everything would be brought together to unity in Jesus, everything in heaven and on earth.

In Ephesians Paul writes of Jesus, "**He ascended on high.**" Eugene Peterson says, that's "*the orienting truth for our lives.*" There's good news: Jesus rules His Church and the world from on high. Jesus ascended and rules from heaven's strategic center, from the center of the stage of history.

The birth of Jesus then signaled a new era in history. God had entered history as a person, and made it unmistakably clear that He is on our side, doing everything needed to save us.

This story is seemingly too good to be true, but indeed, something new is happening. Our Creator isn't out to get us and instead wants the best for us. One by one in Jesus day, men and women began to believe this. We believe this. Jesus' name means God to the rescue. "*God is here, and good news, He's on our side!*" Jesus is at center stage of history and that's good news!

Would you pray with me?

Lord, we ask for the filling of your Holy Spirit that we can be in on the action of what you want to do in our lives. Let us not be spectators of Your salvation story, but eager participants through the reconciling good You want to do in us and through us. In Jesus Name, Amen.