

From the Pastor's Desk

Do You Have an Internal GPS?

A beggar had been sitting by the side of a road for over thirty years. One day a stranger walked by. "Spare some change?" mumbled the beggar, mechanically holding out his old baseball cap. "I have nothing to give you," said the stranger. Then he asked: "What's that you are sitting on?" "Nothing," replied the beggar. "Just an old box. I have been sitting on it for as long as I can remember." "Ever looked inside?" asked the stranger. "No," said the beggar. "What's the point? There's nothing in there." "Have a look inside," insisted the stranger. The beggar managed to pry open the lid. With astonishment, disbelief, and elation, he saw that the box was filled with gold.

I am that stranger who has nothing to give you and who is telling you to look inside. Not inside any box, as in the parable, but somewhere even closer: inside yourself.

"But I am not a beggar," I can hear you say.

Those who have not found their true wealth, which is the radiant joy of Being and the deep, unshakable peace that comes with it, are beggars, even if they have great material wealth. They are looking outside for scraps of pleasure or fulfillment, for validation, security, or love, while they have a treasure within that not only includes all those things but is infinitely greater than anything the world can offer.

Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now*

Another way to say "Being" is the presence of the Holy Spirit within us. Out of all the festivals in the church, Pentecost, the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit into our hearts, is the least celebrated. On Christmas and Easter churches are full and the celebration continues at home around dinner tables as families gather together. Why is it that Pentecost is all but forgotten?

For all practicable purposes, our society celebrates five major festivals each year: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, hunting season and the Super Bowl. Pentecost doesn't even get honorable mention.

I think the reason for this is because the Holy Spirit is illusive and refuses to be pinned down. Like the wind, it moves where it wills and is beyond control or comprehension. Yet, this dynamic Spirit of God *makes all the difference* to having a meaningful life. But, like the gold in the box mentioned in the above parable, it can lie dormant with little, if any, awareness that it is even there.

In our society today, it's easy to get swept up in anxiety about religion, politics, money, social issues, materialism, fear about the future, etc. It's important to remember that the gold in the box grounds us far deeper than any of these things. Whatever anxiety we may feel is easily extinguished by the eternal presence of "I AM WHO AM", whom Moses met on the mountain and whom we meet in Christ.

The critical question is how do we pry open the lid on the box and get in touch with it?

Welcome to Lent.

My wife Joan knows that I am reluctant to look at a map. Despite white knuckles firmly grasping the steering wheel and a head full of steam that I know where I'm going, we still end up lost. Pride cometh before the fall! I am beginning to learn to listen to the navigator as she studies the map. Similarly, our spiritual lives require humility to ask direction.

Something I have thoroughly enjoyed is our GPS (Global Positioning Satellite) navigation device we bought ourselves for Christmas a couple of years ago. It gently tells us how to get to our destination. It will say something like "In 200 feet, turn left on sixth street". It's a very Lutheran device because it is merciful if we miss a turn. It simply says "recalculating" and then gives alternate directions. Unlike my other navigator, this one never gets irritated if I miss a turn!

What is the GPS in our spiritual lives? The Holy Spirit. GPS can mean **God's Path Shown**, which is what the Holy Spirit does. Other than heaven, I am reluctant to tell anyone what their destination is. Each person has to put forth the effort and discernment necessary to listen to their own GPS. Maybe that's why Passionate Spirituality is often the area most congregations involved in Natural Church Development find they need to focus on. It will be our focus during this next year and you will be invited to participate in groups to discuss what passionate spirituality means to you and how we can grow in this area of our lives.

During Lent, the focus of the journey is more clear — the cross. So the question is: "What do we need to die to in order to rise?" There is no resurrection without death, and resurrection is today, not only after we die. We need to die to our ego, which can be seen in our pride and not having a teachable heart; judging others as inferior to self, absorption with materialism, spiritual apathy, lack of empathy and compassion for others, concern only for self or perceiving yourself as inferior and unlovable. Perhaps this is enough to work on or, after consulting your GPS, you may discover others to add. Come, journey with us this Lent as we die with Christ so we can rise victoriously with him on Easter. (See elsewhere in this Newsletter for our Lenten activities.)

~PB