
Fulfilled in Our Hearing

**An Evensong Meditation by the Rev. Dr. Thee Smith
The Third Sunday after the Epiphany – Year C**

We were in complete agreement, myself and our Canon for Worship, as we previewed today's scripture readings earlier this month. Cathy Zappa spoke for us both as she preached here this morning, declaring that the readings present a treasure house of gospel Good News. And don't miss the Psalm appointed to accompany the two other readings. Psalm 19 is a perfect choice to complement our gospel reading. "The heavens are telling the glory of God," the Psalm declares (Psalm 19:1), alongside Jesus reading from Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Luke 4:18)

But the 'heavens are telling' and the 'Spirit of God is upon me' are not the only accompaniments to today's theme. Also summoning us to join that theme is our Collect appointed for today. For we too are called:

[called] to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works . . . (The Collects, *The Book of Common Prayer*, 1979, p. 215)

Finally, answering that call brings us also to our First Lesson read for today. "For in the one Spirit," St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians, "in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews and Gentiles, slaves and free—we were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). Yes, there is 'a calling on our lives' here today too, a call that we share with all creation, and with Jesus himself, to 'imbibe' and embody that Spirit of God who is the ultimate source of life and vitality for us all.

Even our music gets into the act, reinforcing this theme of the Spirit infused in all creation; infused in Jesus; and infused in all of us. First there was the opening hymn that we sang as the candles were lit: singing together we proclaimed the theme of creation—spanning from our Creator's ordering of stars of heaven to 'the ordering of this life of mine.' (Hymn: "The Stars Declare His Glory"). Then our Meditation Hymn that we sang just now invoked that "Spirit of Life" that proceeds from God to meet our every need. (Hymn: "O Spirit of Life")

But wait for it: our closing hymn also invokes our vital connection here today. It's the theme of the church "unsleeping:"

While earth rolls onward into light,
Through all the world her watch is keeping,
[She] rests not now by day or night.

over each continent and island . . .
The voice of prayer is never silent . . .
[while] earth's proud empires, pass away:
Thy kingdom stands [O God], and grows forever . . .

all Thy creatures [in] Thy sway.

—Hymn: "The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, is Ended"

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But here let me add one more song on my own: "How Can I Keep from Singing?" You may recall that title as an

old Quaker hymn, but that's just because the Quakers adopted it as their signature song several decades ago. It first appeared right after our Civil War, like Atlanta's logo of the Phoenix rising from the flames. Yes, 'how can I keep from singing' when the very heavens are declaring the theme? So here, church friends and friends of Christ, how can I keep from adding a story of my own?

Of course our stories are not all about 'sweetness and light.' They include our failings and shortcomings, and even worse things than that. Just last week I failed to respond to a young woman begging me for money. She stood there out in the cold knocking on my car window while I sat warm inside, working on an important task on my cellphone.

At some point I had waved her away with a motion of my hand. I never even looked at her, so determined I was to stay focused on my task. "Sir, sir," I can still hear her voice calling out to me. "Sir, sir. Just a dollar please."

Precisely here I could have used a good dose of Psalm 19:

Above all, [O God] keep your servant from presumptuous sins;
let them not get dominion over me;
then shall I be whole and sound,
and innocent of a great offense (Ps. 19.13).

Nonetheless I rejoice that despite my falling short of my calling my heart still hearkens to today's gospel message calling out to me:

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor . . . to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19).

Yes, let it be more favorable for me and for you this year, my friends, in this year of our Lord 2022; let it be favorable for us to continue to be the church no matter what failings or shortcomings overtake one or more of us. For this gospel Good News that we are privileged to proclaim with all creation goes beyond any individual failings and shortcomings.

If one part of the church should be rightly condemned for promoting racism or sexism, heterosexism or antisemitism, or if some of us well-deserve the charge, 'You're polluting our children's future,' another part of the church arises to redress those charges, or to remind us of the rights of the unborn for example.

Thus the gospel Good News exceeds even our collective failings and shortcomings. There's a bigger vision here that exceeds any guilt or shame and every horror and atrocity. There is a Spirit of Life that is triumphing over death, darkness and destruction. That is our church's perennial declaration of resurrection life; of Easter life that rises again and again no matter what.

And now let us continue to be heralds of that Good News, doing our part to sound the theme of the glory of God with all creation. For today, dear friends, 'today this good news is being fulfilled in our hearing.' Amen.