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Pastor Larry Hackman
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

I Spy God on the Move: Pouring Acts 19:1-7

I'm Pastor Larry and I get the privilege of sharing God's word with you this morning. I wanted to start with a huge thank you! Last Sunday a couple of you put on a baby shower for Megan and I and it was such an amazing outpouring of love and support for us. Overwhelming! We drove home with about 3 cars full of gifts. We just finished last night opening them all. Megan is going to have to write 187 thank you cards...I'll write a few of them too. There were about 200 of you that showed up – I was really concerned at first. I wondered if I was going to be the only male, but thankfully there were about 5 or 6 guys, so it was well-attended. One of the wonderful things about this baby shower, that I have loved so much, is the overflow of it. The fact that we were blessed, but many, many others are going to be blessed as well. Our child will get a lot of attention. Not every child will get that kind of attention. Not every mom will get a baby shower like we received, or even any shower at all. So the fact that we have been given so much, that there is so much of a bounty and overflow, means that we can bless other people. That means that you can bless other people. So thank you for that. Thank you.

One of the things that the baby shower reminded me was of God's spirit, of how His spirit overflows. Isn't that how God's spirit is with us? When we are filled with the spirit of God, when we are filled with His love, with His power, then it overflows out of our lives and into other people's lives. So this morning we are going to spy (I Spy) on how God's spirit is poured out. We are going to go to Acts chapter 19 and as you are turning to that chapter I will give you a little background and catch you up to where we are in the story of Acts.

Last week, Ellis shared with us a little bit about the apostle Paul's modus operandi was. Paul would go to a place, a city on his missionary journeys and he would start in the synagogue and share the gospel and news about Jesus coming. Some people would listen and often times they would get riled up and upset about what he was saying. So Paul would get kicked out of the synagogue, a riot would happen, or he would get beaten up or stoned, or thrown into jail. Most often, he was run out of the city. It just seemed like this happened over and over again. But as Ellis shared last week, Paul gets a break – God spares him and he gets to spend some time in Corinth. Paul gets even more of a break and goes back home to Antioch. He then starts his third missionary journey and strikes back out and ends up in the city of Ephesus. While Paul is in Ephesus, he meets some guys and that is where we start in chapter 19, verse one.

“While Apollos was at Cornith, Paul took the road through the interior and arrived at Ephesus. There he found some disciples and asked them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?’ They answered, ‘No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.’ So Paul asked, ‘Then what baptism did you receive?’ ‘John’s baptism,’ they replied. Paul said, ‘John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He told the people to believe in the one coming after him, that is, in Jesus.’ On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶ Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied. ⁷ There were about twelve men in all.”

So pray with me. Father God I pray this morning that not only we learn something, not only do we hear the word, Lord, but that we encounter your Spirit, Lord in the truth that your spirit will reveal to us who you are and strip away any lies that are in our life. Lord we pray that we would encounter your spirit and power, that you would empower us and that you would feel us Lord. Most of all Lord we pray that we would encounter the presence of your spirit and that we would know your comfort, that we would encounter you. So, Lord, we ask this, we invite you this morning, in your name we pray. Amen.

This is such an interesting passage in Acts. If you were to read and continue along, it seems like sort of a sigh. It is kind of strange in many ways. I have a lot of questions when I read this passage – like – what were John’s disciples doing all the way in Ephesus? That is a long way from where John was doing ministry. And, why didn’t they know about the Holy Spirit? John the Baptist talked about the Holy Spirit a lot. What exactly did they believe – they called them believers, but what did they believe? If you do some research you realize that the most you can do is speculate. There is not a whole lot of good answers, so I am going to speculate and tell you what I think is going on here.

I think that these guys got some secondhand information. I think they might not even have been Jews, they could have been Gentiles, people who weren’t Jews. They might have heard about this guy John the Baptist, they might have been told about him by disciples of John the Baptist. But they received secondhand information. They probably knew the basics and that there was one god and that this god was calling them to repentance and to turn away from whatever lifestyle they had and seek him. They knew that they should anticipate and look forward to a Messiah. So then Paul comes along, meets these guys and says...hey, this anticipation you’ve been having – I’ve got the answer for you – you were looking for Jesus all along. This is the guy who John the Baptist was talking about. So they believe, they are baptized in the name of Jesus and then they receive the Holy Spirit.

So, it’s fairly cut and dry and straightforward, if you put it that way. This passage has so much more going on here. It’s not actually in the passage that we realize what is going on – it’s actually in the tip of an iceberg. If you look at an iceberg and

you see the top and it's floating by in the water all lovely and white and underneath there is so much more going on. That is exactly what this passage is. In order to really see the rest of the iceberg, you have to span the entire scope of the Bible and go all the way back to the beginning. So that is what I am going to do and spend a few minutes and walk through some of the story of the Bible to understand how we get to this point in Acts where we meet these twelve guys in Ephesus and they experience the Holy Spirit. It all begins in the Garden of Eden. God creates mankind, creates the World and creates humankind, man and woman. His goal is to spend time with them, to be with them and them to be with Him. That was His purpose – that is why He created mankind – just to be with them and for them to be with Him.

So there they are in the presence of God, no fear, no worry. They are not ashamed – they were naked and not ashamed, because they were pure. At some point they believed a lie, that God didn't love them, that they had to strike out on their own. So they did – they struck out on their own, believed the lie and they were cast out of the Garden because of that. That begins the story of history. The story of all the pain and suffering of our world began right there at that decision and ever since there every human has made that same choice – to strike out on their own – to believe that God doesn't love them. But God had a plan to be with them and wanted to restore that relationship with humankind. So as the years went on, humankind became more and more wicked But God found one man, his name was Abraham. He told Abraham that even in your old age I am going to give you a son and through your son you will have a nation. Many nations will come from you, like the stars in the sky. In that nation you will bless the world. God told Abraham that his nation, his descendants, would bless the world. In that we get a little clue as to what God's plan was going to be. He was seeking to be present to His people.

So Abraham had a son, named Issac and then Issac had two sons, Jacob and Essau. Then Jacob had twelve sons and from those twelve sons grew a nation – the nation of Israel. God revealed himself to this nation, "I am that I am", and He was with them giving them laws. God said I want to be your God and to dwell with you. But it wasn't quite the end of His plan. Because these people rebelled, then didn't understand God's plan. They did not want to be with Him and sought after other gods. But God stuck with them because He had a plan – He wanted to be with His people.

And so, in the midst of His people, He sent men called prophets. The prophets talked about God's plan and revealed His plan even more. There was the prophet Isaiah who said that God would send a man, a suffering servant, who would take on the sins of his people and cleanse them, like a pure and spotless lamb. Then there was the prophet Ezekiel who said that God would give His spirit to the people and that they would receive a new heart and that this prophet would write God's law in the heart and that they would know good and evil and how to follow God from the spirit. Then there was the prophet Joel who said that God would pour out His spirit on sons and daughters, on old and young, and on servants. So God's plan was

happening and then Jesus came. Jesus's name was Jesus, but it was also Emmanuel (God With Us). Here we have a God with us, in the flesh, as a man. Jesus spent time with people, with twelve disciples and he taught them what kind of God his Father was, his Father is. At the end of his ministry, Jesus died on the cross and rose again in order to make a way for God to be present with us in order (as the prophets said) to cleanse us from our sins.

But that wasn't the end of the plan. Jesus comes back to his disciples and he meets them outside of Jerusalem and lets them know he would be leaving but to wait for the Holy Spirit to come empower on you and Jerusalem. You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth. In what we see here as he says this to his disciples is that we see the beginning of the end of the plan. We see the plan coming to fruition, because thousands of years had taken place since God had made mankind. So much anticipation, so much time, and now we see at the beginning of Acts that it is coming true. Finally, God is going to be present with His people because Jesus was a man, he couldn't be everywhere at once, so he needed to pour out His spirit.

I wanted to demonstrate to you what this would look like, what this idea of pouring out of His spirit on all of mankind. So, I've got here this wonderful makeshift champagne fountain. Just imagine that this is Jerusalem, this top bit right here. What is going to happen when I start pouring into this cup? It is going to overflow, right? So here is God's spirit in Jerusalem (pouring), oh, there is Judea (continue pouring). You can see that God's spirit doesn't have an end – it keeps on going, on pouring out. As it goes into Judea it ends up in Samaria. That spirit keeps on going – He just wants to pour out His spirit and be with His people. So He keeps on pouring His spirit out into all of the world so that young and old may know Him to the ends of the earth.

That was God's plan, what He was doing at the beginning of the book of Acts. What He was explaining to His disciples and why He tells them to wait for Him. As we continue through the book of Acts we see that happening; first in Jerusalem with the encounter with the Holy Spirit (Pentacost) as they wait for Him. There were tongues of fire, fireworks, speaking in different tongues and languages of the world, so that all may know that God is present to them. In Chapter 7, the church is persecuted, chased out of Jerusalem into Judea and then into Samaria and Jesus had said. We see a similar encounter like Pentacost happen in Samaria.

In Chapter 10 Peter meets Cornelius and the Centurians and once again, God pours out His spirit on Gentiles, people who aren't even Jews, so that all may know and be with God. Finally, we get to Chapter 19, the ends of the earth. God's spirit is being poured out and it continues to go and pour out because that was God's plan from the beginning. He wants to be with His people. He wants to make His presence known.

What is so beautiful about this seemingly obscure passage, is that there is so much depth behind it, so much build up in thousands of years of anticipation and finally God's spirit is being poured out in the world, so that we can be in a place like they were in the Garden of Eden, unashamed to be in God's presence.

I love this passage because it may seem to not be that much of a big deal – it is the unfolding of history before our very eyes. History continues to unfold and God continues to pour out His spirit. So what does that mean for us? One of the things that I was reflecting on as I was reading this passage is that I feel that many of us in the church and outside of the church are like John's disciples. We are like these guys that said, very emphatically, that they didn't know who the Holy Spirit is. Who is this guy, the Holy Spirit? Some of us in our faith think that all we are called to do is simply believe...yes, but why? God didn't simply want people to believe Him, he wanted us to be with Him. Many of us have stopped short, we are like John's disciples that we know something about God, but we don't know who God is like. We have never experienced what it means to be with the Holy Spirit – to have the Holy Spirit poured into our lives.

There is a lot as you look in to this passage and reflect on the Holy Spirit where you can see and understand that these guys encountered the Holy Spirit and were changed forever. This passage is pretty divisive a lot of times. There are many passages like this in Acts where whole denominations have sprung up over the opinions and ideas about what this means in terms of the Holy Spirit.

There is one thing we can all agree on and that is if you need the Holy Spirit, if you need God, you are going to be different. It is going to change you and be apparent in your life that the Holy Spirit is active in it. That is true in any relationship – you recognize that when you are in a relationship with someone, that someone is changing you. I was thinking about this and one of the people that really sticks out in my mind in relationships is Pastor Mark. I have the privilege of being with Pastor Mark, of working with him. He is a character and you know him at some level. Look at him and not know that being with somebody like that is going to change you. For me, it's been wonderful. These last three years I can look back and then look forward to my future ministry and say absolutely that my ministry will never be the same, because I spent time with this guy. I have learned from him, his values, integrity, the way he does ministry, the way he preaches, and I'm changed because I was in relationship with him.

Kids, you wonder why your parents are worried about who you hang out with. Well, that is why, because relationships change you and so you choose your friends carefully. You decide who you are going to hang out with because they can change you, they can make you a different person. And if that is true for our earthy relationships, for the relationships that we have with each other as human beings, as men and women – then how much more true is that for our relationship with God? How much more true that when we meet the Holy Spirit, when we encounter God as he pours out His spirit on all mankind, that we are changed as well?

It's just like any other relationship. My relationship will be different from your relationship, as in my example of Pastor Mark, because we are different people. As we encounter the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit interacts with us differently. For some people that may mean simply that they are able to quit smoking, or they are able to quit being as angry. For some people, like the apostle Paul, it means that he is able to get beat up, stoned, thrown in jail and keep on ticking. That is what the Holy Spirit did for the apostle Paul. It gave him that power, it gave him that ability.

Even as I am saying that the Holy Spirit changes us, I want to point out that God does not draw near us to change us. But in drawing near to God, we are changed...right? He doesn't come near us and say we need to be changed, but in His presence we are changed. It is impossible to not be.

So this is God's plan. He wants to be with us. He wants to fill us with His spirit, because in this we see glimpse of eternity. Even now as we experience the Holy Spirit changing us and empowering and giving us His love, giving us His presence, we get a taste of what eternity with God will be like.

I want you to walk away as I finish this morning with a couple of different things. I think we can learn something from John's disciples. I think we can look at how they responded to Paul and learn from that. So a couple of different things; the first thing is John's disciples lived a lifestyle of repentance. They knew that there were things in their life that they had to let go of in order to encounter God's presence. They had to change their mind about things and choose to go in a different direction. For us, as we consider encountering God, of having His spirit poured out on us, then we need to live a lifestyle of repentance. That doesn't matter whether you already believe in Jesus, whether you already follow Jesus, or you do not yet. Either way, even as followers of Jesus, we need to be in a continuous lifestyle of repentance. Continually reminding ourselves of what we need to let go of in order to follow Jesus, in order to encounter His presence through the Holy Spirit.

The second thing that John's disciples did was that they purified their appetites. As they encountered Paul, they were already anticipating and looking forward to a savior and God's presence. So their appetite was there. What is interesting about our age, more than any other age, is that we are so distracted by different things to consume. There are many things that can take away our attention and that say "satisfying- consume it". But the reality is that the source of all goodness, life, power, wisdom, joy and love is in God. It is through the Holy Spirit. So why would we ever think that anything else could really, truly satisfy us than God himself? That is what it means to purify your appetite and to understand and remind ourselves that true satisfaction comes from God – no matter what. Everything else is but a shadow of the satisfaction of being with God and what He can give to us. So John's disciples purified their appetites.

And, finally, John's disciples responded in obedience, even as they were listening to Paul telling them they needed to be baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus...that it was His command. They obeyed Jesus and were baptized in Jesus's name. In their obedience the Holy Spirit showed up and they experienced God's presence.

This morning there are a number of us, I guarantee it, that God is always calling to us to be obedient to something. Probably just one thing that God is calling us to be obedient to. For some of us there is a calling to be baptized, who need to respond in exactly the same way that these twelve men did. So on Sunday, August 30 there is Baptism in the Harbor. Or it may mean that you need to be plugged into the community and come to the new membership class that is happening right after this service. There are other things that we can be obedient to. Maybe it is simply praying with somebody, or asking for forgiveness, or maybe letting go of something. Whatever it is, I bet if you were to stop, to be silent and to listen to the promptings of your heart, God is calling you to respond in obedience, just as these twelve men did.

This is God's plan - it is unfolding before our very eyes and it continues to unfold. God continues to pour out His spirit on the world because He wants to be with you and with me. That is a taste of eternity. I hope that you, along with me, are anticipating that. That you have experienced or want to experience and will experience what it means to be in God's presence, even now.