

May 5/6, 2018  
Rev. Scott Shreve

Resurrection Living-Adjustments Needed

St. Paul UMC, Omaha  
Acts 10:44-48

I am concluding my second year here at St. Paul. The Spirit moved my heart to bring about major adjustments in the fiscal policy at St. Paul early on in my tenure. When I feel the Spirit move in my heart I always find it as an opportunity to invite others into the dialogue to see if the movement in my heart might be confirmed. Through conversations with the Finance Team, Church Council, District Superintendent and others I found confirmation of the Spirit's movement in my heart back in the summer of 2016. Then we moved forward together and were blessed by God in the process.

Once again, this spring I feel the Spirit moving my heart. I know that movement of the Spirit is a gift from God but I must confess that I am always hesitant to open the gift up.

Why the hesitancy?

First, my sense of God's movement in my heart can be embarrassing. Maybe no one else will agree that it is the movement of the Spirit in our midst but just another sign that the Pastor is a bit more "looney tunes" than we perceived before.

Second, I hesitate because I know some might agree and some might disagree which can result in division in the congregation. I love consensus but I know sometimes it takes time and healthy discussion to get to the point of consensus.

Division was the initial aftermath of the events we read about in our lesson from Acts today. We read that as Peter preaches to the Gentiles that they are filled with the Holy Spirit and he baptizes them. On the surface it would seem that Peter's preaching and a crowd of people inspired by the message requesting to be baptized in the name of Jesus and then being baptized is all good. It was good, yet it opened up a unforeseen and large division in that first generation church.

Up to this point in time just about everyone who joined the Jesus movement was Jewish. They had a common history and common customs. They all followed the Laws of Moses including the dietary laws. Now a large group of Gentiles who had a different history and certainly did not follow a kosher diet or the other Jewish laws were joining the Jesus movement. Many leaders thought that the Gentiles needed to commit to circumcision, dietary guidelines, and other Jewish laws as a prerequisite to being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. But other leaders in the early church disagreed and stood up for no restrictions on the Gentiles as long as the Holy Spirit moved them to become disciples of Jesus Christ. The dialogue, debate and decision making regarding this division we find recorded in chapters 11-16 of Acts, especially chapter 15. It was not an easy process. The no restrictions perspective prevailed.

Knowing that embarrassment or even division might surface I choose to share because I am always filled with hope since experience tells me that when the Spirit moves my heart that I receive only a part of the picture. That means that as I share with you my insight that the Spirit will move your hearts to complete the full vision that God intends for us. I have shared what has moved my heart this spring with about a dozen leaders here at St. Paul and they have filled in some parts on the canvas I left blank. I would now like to share with you so you might fill in more blank parts or maybe just tell me to get another canvas and start over.

*Can you envision a more vibrant St. Paul congregation with Sunday morning gatherings that are balanced across the age spectrum?* I can, that is the vision that has been moving my heart this spring. It will involve intentional outreach & engagement with the Country Club and Benson neighborhoods as well as creative mission work.

Making this vision a reality will find us revisiting the focus of our Ministry Teams, Administrative Structure, and Sunday Morning format. Because of time constraints I am not going to speak about the Ministry Teams aspect or Administrative Structure but only the Sunday morning format. I plan on presenting all parts for consideration at our Church Council on May 21. I know my presentation of Spirit's movement in our midst will change with the feedback that you provide because it has already changed with the feedback I have received from others over the last month.

*Can you envision a more vibrant St. Paul congregation with Sunday morning gatherings that are balanced across the age spectrum?*

That would be a dramatic change for us. Yet the Spirit has enabled me to envision as least 30 children and their families in worship each week at St. Paul this fall which will lay the foundation for a vibrant congregation emerging for years to come. Yet, for this vision to come to pass we will have to make significant adjustments just like the early church had to make needed adjustments to embrace Gentiles as full-fledged members.

### **What is the vision that has come to my heart?**

A Single Sunday Service with Worship & Children's Sunday-School at the same time.

You may ask "WHY?"

It is all about developing a critical mass where energy is present as families with children see, greet, and connect with other families with children. We can all enjoy the balance across the age spectrum in a lively and full sanctuary. (Obviously, many other aspects of church life will need to compliment this.)

### **Let's paint the picture a little more for a Single Sunday Service:**

- 60-70 minute service with blended music (Choir, Fusion Band, Bells, Special Music)
- children present at beginning with release to Sunday-School early in the service
- Current Adult Sunday-School classes to continue the hour before worship
- Saturday evening service to remain as is

It will mean changes for folks attending Sunday services but how can those in the Fusion Service and those presently in the Sanctuary service each feel at home. Here are some thoughts:

### **Expand/Reboot Gathering Area**

- Upgrade coffee and tea, juice service
- Pastries supplied by bakery
- Healthy food options provided
- Have Team oversee refreshments
- Donations encouraged/accepted
- Upgrade seating and décor in the gathering area

### **Reboot seating in the Sanctuary**

- Place pews at a small angle for congregational closeness
- provide greater space between pews
- Refit back of pews with cup holders
- donuts, etc. welcome in sanctuary
- clean-up crew trained and on-hand

### **Sanctuary Sound/Visuals**

- Place screens and monitors in Chancel area for Fusion lyrics, some of the liturgy, sermon slides, video mission moments, etc.
- Develop space for sound & visual control board
- Any work done in the Sanctuary will take into consideration the architecture and history of the facility. Modern amenities can be added in a respectful manner.

Children will be in worship at the beginning of each service with their families. This will provide us with a wonderful sense of joy and energy. They will be released to Sunday-School early in the service. Since there will be Sunday-School for children during worship we want to provide an option for Sunday-School teachers to attend the full worship service upon occasion. Therefore, this plan would develop two sets of Sunday-School teachers & teen shepherds for children so they can alternate months. In addition, have a staffed nursery.

**Develop laser focus for the rest of 2018 which means change in operations for short time**

Invite all program teams to place their work on hold for the rest of 2018 so people on those teams as well as other persons in the congregation can place full energy in activities related to outreach, hospitality, and developing a fantastic Sunday morning experience.

**Major focus for the remainder of 2018 will be on the following activities:**

- Communion Offering Interpretation (Mission)
- Benson Parade Day in July, Benson Paint-a-thon, Health Fair in November (Mission/Outreach)
- Ongoing USPS mailings & Social Media (Outreach)
- Sunday Morning inside Greeters & Ushers and Outside Greeters (Hospitality)
- Well trained elevator operators on duty (Hospitality)
- Teachers and Shepherds for Sunday-School children (Education/Hospitality)
- Follow up Team to welcome Newcomers (Welcoming)
- Advent Fair (Outreach)
- Sunday Morning Food Service and Clean up Teams (Hospitality)
- St. Paul members partnering with families that have children over the summer and fall (Outreach)

I believe the Sunday morning activities can be achieved with excellence within the One Worship Service approach.

Moving forward in this fashion will require each of us to make sacrifices of some personal preferences for the sake of growing a more vibrant congregation. Yet, a full sanctuary with people that have balance across the age spectrum will be a great experience. In our lesson from Acts 10 we see the Spirit move in the early disciples so more folk might be active in the Jesus movement but it meant significant adjustments for the early church. How might the Spirit be moving in our midst?

Let me hear your thoughts. Which ideas work for you or just don't work? What other items might be considered? How is God speaking to your heart as we think of vibrancy at St. Paul, now and in the future?

- We can have a short conversation now.
- You have been given cards for your feedback. Just place them in the basket in the back.
- You can also e-mail me with comments at [sshreve@stpaulomaha.org](mailto:sshreve@stpaulomaha.org), call me at 402-350-3140 to talk or set up a visit.
- Finally, all are invited to attend our Church Council on May 21st at 7 p.m. in the Fellowship Hall.