

In the Spirit  
Mark 16:17-18

The Lay Ministers are reaching out to members of Our Savior who haven't been here in a while. Along with a letter, a postcard is going out with a number of responses the members can mark indicating their wishes. Several of the cards have returned. One came back in an envelope with an additional note. It explained that this couple is looking for a more Spirit filled church that resembles Jesus' description in Mark 16.

You remember what that says, don't you? "*And these signs will accompany those who believe: in my name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover*" (17-18).

My first thought was, "Good luck in finding a church like that around here!" But the more I thought about it, I realized I have performed quite a few exorcisms. I speak in a new tongue. I don't have a problem picking up snakes. I have laid hands on the sick and they have recovered. As for the drinking deadly poison thing, well, four out of five ain't bad."

Anyone care to hear me explain myself?

Every baptism is a form of exorcism. In fact, Martin Luther wrote a baptismal service in which the pastor would say, "Depart you unclean spirit and give room to the Holy Spirit." The opening prayer implores that God would "break all the snares of the devil with which the baptized is bound." Following the Flood Prayer, there was a more exorcism language, concluding with the words, "I adjure you, you

unclean spirit, by the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost that you come out and depart from this servant of God, for He commands you, you miserable one, He who walked upon the sea and stretched forth His hand to sinking Peter."

In his preface to this order of Baptism, Luther emphasized the seriousness of this exorcism, "Remember, therefore, that it is no joke to take sides against the devil and not only to drive him away from the little child, but to burden the child with such a mighty and lifelong enemy."

As to speaking in a new tongue, I do it every day; so do you. When Mark wrote these verses no one spoke English. It is a new tongue.

The snakes? I can snatch them out of the water without a hitch. If it's on the ground, I use a stick to hold it still so I can grab it safely. I wouldn't call it fun, but I can and have. It was just in a dream, but I did it last night. Craig Zebuhr and I were at Backbone. We saw the biggest snake I have ever seen in the wild. Craig didn't scream, but he took off. I grabbed a stick, pinned it down, then picked it up. When I had finished looking at it, I tossed it into the lake.

I was in two different hospitals last week. I put my hand on and prayed for both people. I am expecting both of them to recover and return home.

Jesus' words, "*You shall not put the Lord your God to the test*" (Matthew 4:7) come to mind when I consider drinking poison. Though it does bring to mind a conversation rumored to have taken place between Winston Churchill and Nancy Astor: Said she: "If you were my husband, sir, I'd give you a dose of

poison!” To which he replied, “If I were your husband, I’d take it!”

I would say that this congregation has just the right amount of the Holy Spirit. Where two or three are gathered in His name, there God is present – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God has promised that His Holy Spirit comes to us and works in us through His word, and we get a large dose of that every Sunday. We speak it and sing it in the liturgy. We hear it read from the lectern. We hear it preached from the pulpit. We sing it in our hymns. We take it into our mouths at the communion rail. God’s Spirit is in this place.

God’s Holy Spirit is also in you. St. Paul is talking about you when he writes: *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

Paul continues with words of Law that we recognize as being all too true: “*For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law...*” Each of us has set aside God’s Law to follow our own desires. In our thoughts, words, and deeds we have shown our hostility to God and not submitted to Him.

God’s word, in our text, does not leave us stuck in our sin. Rather, it points us to the Spirit. Some texts just preach themselves, and this is one of them. *You however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in*

*you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

That is you. You have undergone an exorcism. When you were baptized the spirit of the devil was driven out and the Holy Spirit came to live within you. Every time you hear or read God’s word the Holy Spirit within you is renewed and refreshed.

You are in the Spirit. In the Spirit, you now have life and peace. Because you are in the Spirit, Jesus’ promise to Martha is His promise to you: “*I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die.*” In the Spirit of Christ you will have life and peace forever.

In the meantime, seek the Spirit where He is to be found – in God’s word. Remind yourself daily that the demons are gone; you are a baptized child of God. Speak in your new tongue of what the Father has done for you through Jesus. Pray for the sick; use your hands to help them in any way you can. If you would rather stay away from snakes and poison, I won’t hold it against you. Neither will your heavenly Father. He wants you to live with Him, but it doesn’t have to be right away.

You have some earthly life left to live. By God’s grace it is life lived in the Spirit. You are not condemned. You have life and peace. Amen.