

## “We Can Be Taught”

John 14:22-27

May 9, 2010

Lin Grace Rohr

There are many reasons that Madison is a great place to live. One of them is the opportunities available to us through the Overture Center. This month the feature presentation is Disney’s *Lion King*, the Musical. How many of you have or will see it? This fabulous re-telling of the classic story of a king being murdered, his throne being illegally taken through the deception of the young rightful ruler is marvelously conveyed through inspiring songs and breathtaking costumes. The actors behind the puppets are lost in the action and all join on the journey of the adventures of the young prince Simba to his rightful place as king of the pride lands. Among other things the story is one of learning and growing through the wisdom of elders, in Simba’s case Mufasa, Zazu and Rafiki, the companionship of carefree friends, Pumbaa and Timon, and the collaboration and comfort of the community of lions in the context of all the wildlife.

Some of you may be thinking, what does this have to do with us? Besides being a fun analogy that young and old can relate to, it can help us to understand our text in John. We are on a journey of faith, the adventure of our lives, growing and learning together through the wisdom of others, the companionship of friends and symbiosis of our community in the circle of the life here at Covenant. Our text in John is a part of Jesus’ farewell discourse to his disciples. They were anxious about what’s next, about what was going to happen. We can relate to this. Anxiety is prevalent in our society and world. In recent weeks, a terrorist attack averted at Times Square in New York City, and an ecological and economical tragedy not averted but floating in the Gulf of Mexico to name two of the many anxiety producing situations our country is facing, not naming the many of the world. To those first disciples facing their anxieties, Jesus promises a peace that only he can give...a peace that the world cannot give...and encourages those first disciples, and through them us, to not be troubled or afraid. This kind of peace we’ve heard many a sermon on, and we’ll hear others I’m sure, but this morning I want to focus on a different part of Jesus’ discourse. Our focus verse for today is John 14:26, Jesus said, “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.” Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit was sent for a reason, “to teach us all things and to remind us” what Jesus had said. This morning as we get ready to celebrate Pentecost later in the month of May, we’re going to look at the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, first generally and then specifically here at Covenant, and how we are being taught.

As we begin, it’s important to remember a distinction in John’s Gospel from the Synoptics’ regarding the Holy Spirit. Unlike the Synoptic gospels, in John’s Gospel there was no Spirit until Jesus had been crucified and glorified. [John 7:37-39]. In this farewell discourse, Jesus is telling them that even though he is going away, they will not be left alone. This assurance is essential in John’s theology. John’s gospel more than any other emphasizes the close relationship between Jesus and his disciples using the Greek word, *menein* meaning "to abide," "to remain," "to dwell." thirty-four times. The Synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke only use the word eight times between them. This intimate connection between Jesus and the first disciples is what one prolific preacher, Fred Craddock says: “The Holy Spirit will do for the Church.” The Holy Spirit connects the Church to God through Christ, and connects us to one

another, just as those first disciples were connected to one another because they were all connected to Jesus. Generally speaking, the Holy Spirit gives the church life! The Holy Spirit breathed life into the church. That is why we call Pentecost the “birthday” of the Church, church with a capital “C” and through the Holy Spirit each church, small “c” is taught how to live that life in their context.

How are we taught? Through the Holy Spirit, we are taught how to live the Spirit filled life. Yes, as human beings we have anxieties. Yes, as human beings we have a desire to be connected. Yes, we have a longing for the peace that Christ promised...connected to **that** promise is the promise of the Holy Spirit. These are live questions we are hunting the answers to: is living the Spirit-filled life an antidote for anxiety...a way to receive the peace that Christ gives, not as the world gives? How do we know if we are living in the Spirit...Paul in his letter to the Galatians tells us what the evidence of the Spirit-filled life is: he calls them “the fruits” of the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” Are these in our lives, individually and together as a community of faith? These are essential questions to ask as we seek to learn the way of living in the Spirit...and yes, we can be taught!

We can be taught...we are taught from the beginning at the moment of baptism, when a child or adult is lifted up, celebrated! That mysterious moment is alluded to, even an attempt at copying, in the musical The Lion King, when young Simba is dedicated, besides all of the obvious differences between fantasy and reality, this thought pounced on me when I saw that scene, in baptism, every person is a child of the King, the King of Kings, and a heir to the promises of God. At baptism, parents, the person if they are old enough, and the congregation, make promises to teach and nurture, or to learn and grow in the faith. We seal the promises and ask God’s blessing followed by the anointing of oil. The same Spirit that Jesus promised to his first disciples is with us, through the power of Pentecost, teaching us and reminding us, of Jesus’ ministry and mission. As a baptized community, individually and together, we live the life of the Spirit in and through our church, knowing that throughout the life of a church, the context changes, and so churches look to the Spirit to keep teaching us and to keep reminding us of Christ’s ministry and mission, and what that may look like in our particular place, in any particular year, as we seek to live in the Spirit.

The context here at Covenant has continued to change over the years and we have continued to be taught. In the last year or so those changes have led us on an adventure. It hasn’t been a year of “Hakuna Matata,” that is the Swahili phrase meaning “there are no worries,” but we have lived our faith prayerfully lifting our concerns to God, sharing them with one another and addressing what we could when we could. It’s been a time of discernment, which is just a theological word for “faithfully figuring things out!” With the announcement today of our interim pastor for discernment, I want to remind you of the specifics of the journey we’ve been on as we enthusiastically prepare to continue that journey with the interim when he arrives. While working with Presbytery in bringing the interim to serve with us, we did some essential things that will help our work with the interim to be more efficient and more effective. We’ve shared this at the Congregational meeting in February, but as our interim will start with us in June, let me remind you in this form of a “morning report.”

This has been a year of great gains, some tangible and some not. Let me highlight three of the tangible. In the last year, Session has been seeking ways to secure a financial base. We were aware of some financial challenges even before the economic downturn in the fall of 2008. Through intentional decisions to address our financial situation, through sacrifices, through your

generous and gracious support of God's ministry and mission through Covenant, we are in a much better place to create a long-term financial plan that enables our faithfulness to be lived and shared. Second, Session has been grappling with our long term building needs and responsibilities; there too, we are beginning to put a plan in place, which we will be sharing with you in the next few months. Third, Session has updated our church's plan of organization and our by-laws, both of which you approved at the February meeting. As moderator of Session, I am grateful, and I hope you share with me that gratitude, gratitude for you the congregation and for the elders who have said "yes" to following the Spirit in serving God through Covenant!

With the coming of the interim next month, I want to be clear and we will share it again and again, if need be, what the interim's work with us will be. The interim will take the discernment process on to the next part of our journey: enabling the congregation to discern together how we might continue, expand, and/or re-focus our ministry and mission in particular what staffing model is best for us to do that. Second, he will support and provide other pastoral duties as requested by me and the Session. Chip/Al will share more of the details in the Session update later in this service.

So where are we? We are still being taught! And our education is about to embark us on the next path of our ecclesiastic safari! Of course, this is a very narrow look at the vastness of the Spirit's teaching work in the Church, but it's necessary for us here at Covenant to get our "house in order" so that God's ministry and mission through us can be enriched and enhanced as we witness to God's love and light. Sure, sometimes we will encounter wild things that frighten us. Other times we will marvel at mysterious beauty along the way. Still at other times it will be like getting hit on the head with the stick of wisdom. But we are open to learning! For that's what disciples are...learners. In humility, we recognize we don't know it all. In compassion, we commit to living in community. In honesty, we forgive and free one another to follow the "Lion of Judah" as Jesus is referred to in the book of Revelations. As lions and lionesses, as children of God, with great anticipation and expectation for the promises of God to be lived out in our midst, we welcome anew the Holy Spirit, teaching us and reminding us of the ministry and mission of Jesus Christ, teaching us to share with one another and with the world, the fruits of the Spirit, self-control, gentleness, faithfulness, kindness, patience, peace, joy and most of all, love! Amen!