

LIFE IN CHRIST – LIFE THROUGH THE SPIRIT  
*“Be the evidence that God exists.”*

Scripture I  
John 12:44-48

*Jesus proclaimed: “To believe in me, is not to believe in me but in him who sent me; to see me, is to see him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that no one who has faith in me should remain in darkness. But if anyone hears my words and disregards them, I am not his judge; I have not come to judge the world, but to save the world. There is a judge for anyone who rejects me and does not accept my words ....”*

LIFE IN CHRIST

Good morning friends. Beginning this sermon, I hope sharing my thoughts comes across clearly, conveying the relationship that I have with the Spirit of Jesus – that this relationship path has been carved out by first getting to know the man, Jesus himself, moving into the phase of my relationship with his Spirit, and sharing my desire to be evidence of his existence through this relationship.

The journey of my faith from the beginning is a challenge for me to share. I found that as I sat down to write, I struggled to organize my thoughts this time. And despite asking the Spirit for guidance, the struggle was still there. I was confident in the content, but the expression of the content through writing was confusing. I hope I have transcended this confusion, friends, making my thoughts clear. Sometimes starting at the end and tracing one’s steps back provides a chance to see with fresh eyes and greater mental clarity.

Currently I’m in one of the most profound places of faith, and it’s so peaceful even though earthly challenges appear to be great. I have never been so grateful for my faith as I am now and so so grateful for my faith family, particularly in my Bible study, on retreat, and when I’m able to attend service here in this beautiful sanctuary. The ability for me to “attend” online keeps me connected when it’s really not possible for me to be here physically. My broadened sense of others who worship God regardless of how has allowed me to soften the edges of my mind. After all, we’re all in this together.

John's quotations of Jesus are laden with hope, life, love and light. The invitation to know God through Jesus is as clear as it gets. There is no force on Jesus' part, just an "invitation" to have a relationship with him, yet there is a tone of threat when Jesus proclaims, *"There is a judge for anyone who rejects me and does not accept my words."* I'm not a theologian; I'm simply a follower. My interpretation is that Jesus' love for God the Father is so deep, so strong, and his message of God rings so true to his being, that "pity the fool" who does not hear it. Jesus is the messenger.

Through Bible study, I have, as with other fellow pilgrims, investigated, pondered and dreamed of this man, both divine and human: Jesus the Christ. Bruce's guidance is raw at times and his thought-provoking suggestions, coupled with the open, relaxed, safe environment to express our thoughts, questions and opinions, bring an intimacy to our group – and all of this occurs over the phone. Can you imagine? How can a group of individuals be so connected while, for some of us, having never had the opportunity to meet or see each other in person? I take it that it's the same connection the apostle Paul had through his letters – beautifully written, filled with love for his recipients, full of intention and specific instruction. There are several ways we as human beings connect – love, intimacy, alliances, bonds – with many submeanings to each of these. Take the word LOVE. There are many definitions, depending on the language spoken, yet I found myself boxed into a meaning until I opened my life to studying Scripture.

How does this relate to my relationship with Jesus? Think of it this way: when one wants to get to know someone and it's not possible to meet them in person or in the flesh, one can ask another being about them, investigate/research on their own, or both. The historical accounts of Jesus, the divine human being, are fascinating, inspiring and encompass every emotion and feeling we experience today. I'm in awe of the relevance of Jesus' short earthly life and the impact he made on this world. His humble upbringing; his independence, self-sufficiency, yet living in community; his love for his earthly family, friends and disciples – but ultimately the allegiance to God always came first. God the Father. I'm inspired by his awakening to his purpose and his fearlessness to carry it out at all costs – ultimately his death.

Each of us here today, I surmise, strives to awaken to the life of a Christian. It is a journey, a process, with unknowns along the way. Yet we have the ultimate role model. My own path was not always

straight and narrow, was colorful at times, and at times followed the direction of others rather than following the course my Creator intended for me. Yet it wasn't until my relationship with Jesus got really clear that I bothered to "check in" with my life's decisions. It's never too late. A life in Christ is one that walks his talk: a life so filled with faithful confidence – surrendering to a higher guidance – that for all else, *"though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil, for you are with us; your rod and your staff, they comfort us."*

Scripture II  
Romans 6:5-11

*For if we have become identified with him in his death, we shall also be identified with him in his resurrection. We know that our old humanity has been crucified with Christ, for the destruction of the sinful self, so that we may no longer be slaves to sin, because death cancels the claims of sin. But if we thus died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him, knowing as we do that Christ, once raised from the dead, is never to die again: he is no longer under the dominion of death. When he died, he died to sin, once for all, and now that he lives, he lives to God. In the same way you must regard yourselves as dead to sin and alive to God, in union with Christ Jesus.*

LIFE THROUGH THE SPIRIT

Life through the Spirit. If it could be so simple; I wish it was. How does one connect with that which feels like wind caressing our skin, like water flowing through our fingers? Lovely imagery, isn't it? I cling to these mental pictures often, and especially when I'm in nature. It's easy to get distracted in this phenomenal world with all that is going on. For me, more than ever, it is necessary as a Christian to pray every day, seeking God's grace and will for me on a DAILY basis. Again, it is a challenge at times to feel the "wind" or the softness of his touch. Bruce has taught us to "go straight to God with our prayers and conversations," but my relationship with the ultimate Creator is still not clear, and I need the sweetness and comfort of the Spirit of Jesus to assist me in getting closer to the Father.

My kinship with Jesus is a powerful, tangible and sensory conduit for knowing the Father. I cannot image not having this connection. I admit I am attached to it, despite the teachings of nonattachment that are often suggested. This is a temporal world, but no one and no thing can separate us from the love of our Lord Jesus – even in death to this world. I am certain of this.

Bruce often speaks of the life beyond the earthly dimension and how he “welcomes” it. I ponder these thoughts; I notice that they were more prevalent when I was in particularly challenging times. More grace-filled thinking is for me to view this thinking as part of the “path” and to view the life beyond this world as part of the journey. I’m in no rush.

The guidance of the Spirit is not always clear – discernment is a delicate dance. Bruce has taught us the “three-day rule of prayer,” taking all our petitions to God for clarity. Though this may not be “prayer protocol,” I have my conversations with Jesus first. I ask the Spirit to help me find the right language to use with God. The Spirit is my liaison, the translator, confirming my request to speak with God, and often I ask Spirit to intercede for me. I admit that often I view God more distant than the Spirit – too busy with the BIG stuff; can’t be bothered with my little petitions; I don’t want to “bother” him with these things. The Spirit, on the other hand, is my friend, my confidant and so close to me that I can feel the Presence when I get quiet and still, which I do more and more these days. My best friend IS the Spirit of Jesus.

Many of you know Barbara Anderson, one of our fellow pilgrims. She now lives in Wisconsin. I’ve been working with her via phone conversations. Her work is in Transformational Coaching. The difference between her and other “life coaches” is that she brings her faith as a Christian into the work. Her understanding of our human life here and our spiritual life and how they MUST relate is profound. We engage in our conversations, with the Divine being the principal guide to the direction of my growth. I’ve grown so much, and I have attained so much clarity working with her. During one session, Barbara said, “Inspiration is more effective than motivation.” Her words ignited a feeling of assurance in knowing that Spirit is the inspiration behind the work that I am called to do – whatever the work is. The higher frequency of Spirit beyond this realm is what matters in all decisions made, even if at times those decisions seem frightening, impossible to carry out, or the kind of “what am I doing” type of decision.

What does it truly mean to live our lives through the Spirit? I can only speak for myself, and even then my ability to stay present with the Presence is a struggle. Surrendering totally every second of the day seems a faraway practice, but I do know that the more I practice staying with the Presence, the thinner the “mind” becomes and a more peaceful emptiness takes space, and this space makes for more intentional, Spirit-filled thoughts. My desire to be with others on this path is stronger. The peace that comes with this shift enables me to attend to the challenges of life, yet profoundly enjoy life in a more grounded sense – less worry, more surrender, going with the flow instead of trying to row upstream. Spirit-sourced messages are clearer, and when the mind molests me, I make the effort to acknowledge the thought, try to drop it, and return to Presence again.

The trammels of the mind will never disappear. Acknowledging this is critical. But I have the Comforter – *we* have the Comforter, always with us to call on. Life’s storms continue, but no storm lasts forever. Staying faithful and trusting has been a challenge for me at times, and now I have come to the realization that when I have taken anything “personally,” that’s when I have gotten into trouble. Please understand that some challenges I have faced were out of my control; maybe you have experienced the same. This is not denial. Dark forces are at work in this dimension. Allowing Spirit, however, to take the helm of the ship is more prudent than to navigate this alone.

Sarah Young writes in one of her daily meditations from *Jesus Calling*: “Other days are overcast and gloomy; you feel the strain of the journey, which seems endless. Dull gray rocks greet your gaze and cause your feet to ache. Yet Joy is still attainable. Search for it as for hidden treasure.” Search for it in the Spirit. Empty the mind as best as you can, and fill the space with the Spirit of Jesus.

Yet another teaching of Bruce’s that Barbara reminded me of is the imagery of a wall separating us from the kingdom. On one side we are standing; on the other side (the kingdom side) is Bruce. He invites us to come through the “door,” and once we are on the other side, we turn around and realize there was NO wall. How simple. Yet the blindness experienced at times, the confusion, the doubt – all manifested by the fear that I have to go it alone. If I am truly living through the Spirit, it is impossible not to trust. Trusting removes the walls of doubt, fear, confusion.

Scripture III  
I John 4:2-3

*The way to recognize the Spirit of God is this: every spirit which acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, and no spirit is from God which does not acknowledge Jesus.*

BE THE EVIDENCE THAT GOD EXISTS

*“The Lord make his face to shine upon you ....”*  
(Numbers 6:25)

In August of this year, I had the experience of being on a ten-day spiritual retreat – a silent retreat in rural Portugal. During that time, my circumstances allowed me to remove myself from day-to-day living and immerse myself in much-needed semi-isolation. During the ten days of silence, there were other beings from all over the world in attendance, but no communication occurred, even as much as eye contact. My living quarters were minimal, including compost toilets and bucket showers. The view from my space was beyond words. The retreat center is located on three hundred acres of lush hills harboring fruit orchards, fig and olive trees, and a landscape very similar in my imagination to the terrain the early apostles and Jesus would journey upon. The environment created an ideal place for me to get very clear with my life and my faith. I struggled at times, as the solitude and quiet triggered many emotions.

It was three-quarters into the retreat when I had an emotional catharsis that I now have come to know as an awakening of Jesus’ true presence. The serpent mind was hard at work to stop this awakening. At the moment of this realization, I became completely free – empty of any heaviness of the mind. At that moment, I glanced at myself in a small mirror – because for that split second, I thought I had disappeared; I thought I had died; I wasn’t sure what was going on. Yet the overwhelming feeling of space, love, joy, peace and the absence of fear was beyond language. I had never felt closer to the Spirit. I knew at that moment it was real. It was evidence that God truly existed! I did not want to leave that “space.” I kept trying to hold onto the experience, but I could not. I “came back” to where I was in my room. I realized then that my life was not going to be the same. And where I have not been able to visit that exact space in the same way, I do know that that dimension exists.

Scripture IV  
I John 4:7-8

*My dear friends, let us love one another, because the source of love is God. Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God.*

We are on the Christian path together, yet each of us travels on our own two feet. Make Jesus your best friend, your ultimate love-bond between this dimension and the dimension of the Supreme Being, God the Father.

Closing Prayer

Father, you sent your only son, Jesus, to all of us, so that with Him – through Him – our lives can be the evidence of YOU.

My prayer for all of you, friends, is for you to take delight in life, to experience well-being and abundance, and to be confident in all circumstances this world brings about. Have the assurance and gratitude that you are protected, graced, guided and loved by our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.