

“Moving with the Spirit”

Keeping in mind the Title for this message, let’s take a few moments to contemplate the many different meanings we might communicate when we begin to speak by saying the phrase “Moving with” or “Move with” and then fill in the person or thing with which one might move. For example, I recall seeing the same basic scene in many movies and television shows, where an exercise or dance class fills a room and everyone is at least attempting to move with the instructor or leader. Sometimes, there is a comical aspect to the occasion, when one or more of the participants fails miserably at “moving with” the teacher – simply cannot “move with” him or her, as everyone else seems to easily “move with” the instructor. There has even been a humorous commercial of such a scene with the Aflac duck performing as the inept student. Another commercial implies every smart investor will “move with” the advice from a certain stock brokerage firm because when a person speaks that company’s name, everyone stops talking and strains to listen to the advice.

There are a multitude of ways people “move with” someone or something or even an idea. **Who or what do you “move with”?** From time to time, there have been folks, who have been part of a cult – a religious or political one. In those circumstances, people follow a leader or an idea, which they believe can do no wrong. Even if the leader is caught “in the act” or even if the evidence documents wrong doing, cult followers will refuse to believe the truth and believe, instead, whatever the political or religious leader claims. Yes, cult followers will even allow their leader to harm them, as evidenced by Jim Jones and the mass suicide of his followers ordered by him in Jonestown. It is a big mistake, perhaps very costly, to “move with” a religious or political cult leader.

Unfortunately, we are all tempted to “move with” the propaganda of what the world portrays as the best type of life to chase after. Society urges us to worship all sorts of false gods, such as wealth, possessions, power over others, violence, and gratification of our physical desires. We are encouraged to live the lives, which chase after those selfish and self-serving ends. Giving in to the self-centered way of life eventually leads to self-destruction. The Apostle Paul pointed out that truth when he wrote the Galatians in verses 19-21a, *“What human nature does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy, and indecent actions; in worship of idols and witchcraft. People become enemies and they fight; they become jealous, angry, and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups; they are envious, get drunk, have orgies, and do other things like these.”* Paul was much more pessimistic about the depravity of human beings than I am, yet, nevertheless, he was correct when he described the self-destructive results of selfish and self-centered living.

So, if it is not a good idea to follow the temptations the world puts before us, who or what do we “move with”? The Apostle Paul’s short answer in our Reading seems to be we are to move with “the Spirit”. However, merely saying we need to move with “the Spirit” is not terribly helpful. **What did the Apostle mean, when he wrote in verse 16, “let the Spirit direct your lives”?** Although Paul had not been among the disciples of Jesus during his Public Ministry, it is reported in the New Testament that he did meet and consult with some of them, especially Peter and John. Perhaps, it was from his discussions with John, in particular, that Paul came to recognize the emphasis on God’s Agape Love as central to Jesus and his ministry. The Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, clearly understood the importance of agape loving others to the Christian Faith. For example, he called believers to use their gifts of the Holy Spirit to benefit others, instead of only themselves. The Apostle Paul also learned from John or other disciples that part of the Holy Spirit’s tasks is to remind us of Jesus and his teachings. Therefore,

“moving with the Spirit” is not merely some nebulous and mysterious concept that one can claim to have without remembering Jesus, his teachings, and his example of agape loving all people.

“Moving with the Holy Spirit” is based on recalling God’s Agape Love has been manifested in Jesus Christ and that we are called to follow his example of agape loving all people. **Therefore, “moving with the Spirit” is also moving with Jesus Christ!** Further, “moving with the Spirit” means we trust – have faith in God’s Agape Love for us and all persons. So, “moving with the Spirit” is not just some spiritual feeling but the actual living out – putting into concrete action the fruits of the Spirit, in order that, God’s Agape Love is experienced by others through us.

Paul explained this to the Galatian Christians in verses 22-23, “But the Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. There is no law against such things as these.” If we “move with the Spirit”, then we manifest those fruits of the Holy Spirit! Unfortunately, our culture’s understanding of Christianity does not include the recognition a Christian exhibits those fruits of the Spirit. Further, many, who piously call themselves Christians, do not show that “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control” because they have come to believe being a Christian is a self-centered activity and its only purpose is so that they win for themselves life after death.

Oddly enough, some of the most pious among self-professing Christians are very legalistic and see obeying biblical commandments as the ultimate requirement for earning salvation – life after death. That view makes it easier for them to not show the fruits of the Spirit with relationship to other folks they see as undesirable – persons, who are not just like themselves. It helps justify rejecting others, especially the powerless and vulnerable – telling them there is no room in the Inn or America.

However, Paul joined Jesus in his antipathy toward such legalism and, instead, called for us to produce the fruits of the Spirit, and wrote in verse 18, “If the Spirit leads you, then you are not subject to the Law.” The Apostle was referring to the Old Testament Law of Moses.

Unfortunately, “moving with the Spirit” – manifesting those qualities or results of the Spirit are not seen as important when prejudice and hate reign supreme, so separating refugee parents from their babies and children is so unimportant, that the supposed Christian Administration did not even have plans for reuniting them when the policy to separate them was implemented. **Instead of living such a selfish and spiritless approach to life, we need to “move with the Spirit” – to manifest the fruits of the Spirit with all people – yes, even the refugee immigrants.** We are called to be God’s Agape Love in our relating with the rejected, the weak, and the vulnerable. As the Apostle Paul would say, “we are not to satisfy the desires of our human nature with it’s selfishness and abuse of others but to show those fruits of being guided by the spirit in our relationships with one another and with all people!” Our God Is Still Speaking emphasis supports God’s Radical and Extravagant Welcome and Acceptance of everyone!

As Paul wrote in verse 25, “The Spirit has given us life; he must also control our lives.”

Relationships are a dance! To be connected is to find a rhythm with those around you. **And when we are in step with the rhythm of the Spirit, the fruits of the Spirit will make the ties that bind us to each other secure.** Let us dance this dance of love, joy and peace! Amen.