

Friends and Fellow Travelers,

It's amazing how a fresh covering of snow reveals things that were there all along. The pine tree that stands in my front yard everyday becomes a work of art when crystallized in ice. Familiar paths become obscured; attention is again required to find a way that has become automatic. Every rise and fall of land invites a sled run. The contrast between earth and oak is heightened as you look on any hillside. It was all there before. And it is all new.

Since that day, Mary Magdalene found an empty tomb. The gospel has not changed. Jesus lived a perfect life; he died a shameful, excruciating death; he rose again, defeating shame and death. This "good news" has been there all along. But somewhere along the line, these historical facts are revealed in an entirely new way.

The cross, that old tree, becomes a work of art. Familiar, routinized habits again require our attention and reconsideration. The normal rise and fall in life carries the possibility of exhilaration, a downhill run with Him. The contrast between light and darkness is heightened. It was all there before. And it's all new. It's not snow. It's the Holy Spirit.

If that new way of seeing, that new way of living and breathing and moving makes sense to you, then there is no metaphor that I could offer that would make it more clear than it already is.

If it doesn't make sense to you, there is no persuasive argument, or clever rhetoric, or finely-tuned philosophy that I might offer to convince you.

Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.

John 3:5-6

Such is the truth that founds our reading today and the clear-eyed proclamation of Paul:

2For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

1 Corinthians 2:2-5

What then are we to do? First, I think we need to confess that far too much of our time and attention has been devoted to persuasive argument, clever rhetoric, and worldly philosophy. Confession leads us to repentance, to walking in a new way.

What is that new way? Listening carefully, looking diligently, trusting hopefully, following bravely and ever more closely after the Holy Spirit, the helper Jesus sent, our guide in all truth and righteousness.

Imagine a church intent on listening to, resting in, working from, and walking with the Holy Spirit.

There is mystery here, but the Holy Spirit is not a genie in a bottle, not the answer to a secret riddle. The abiding presence of the Lord is calling us to abide with Him.

The Spirit is here now. The Spirit is here in the silence and solitude of our prayer life. The Spirit is here as we open God's living word, The Spirit is here as we gather together as God's people.

Snows melt, but The Spirit's power never fades. The Spirit's work in and through us is eternal. Let us see him clearly on the days that glow bright white, but let us seek the Spirit every day and in every type of weather.

Stay warm and keep sledding,

Matthew

Proclaiming Christ Crucified

1And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. 2For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. 3And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, 4and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, 5so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

- Turn to and read John 3:30

- Turn to and read Matthew 5:1-12
- What pattern seems consistent across these three sections of scripture
- What does it look like to live out our actual day-to-day lives, “in the power of God?”

Wisdom from the Spirit

6Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. 7But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. 9But, as it is written,

*“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love him”*

- What are some contemporary examples of, “wisdom of this age?”
- Which of these are most compelling to you, competing the most for your attention, your devotion?
- In what concrete ways can we found our life on the, “wisdom of God?”

10these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. 11For who knows a person’s thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. 12Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. 13And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

14The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one. 16“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

- Several years ago, Frances Chan wrote a book about The Holy Spirit, entitled the Forgotten God.
- For some, this description resonates, for others, arriving from different traditions, the Holy Spirit might have played an outsized role, overshadowing the Father and Son.
- How do you understand The Holy Spirit?

- Is there a time when you have sensed the prompting of the Holy Spirit...and obeyed?
- What hopes and/or anxieties are tied to your understanding of The Holy Spirit?
- Beyond understanding, how do we seek, hear from, and follow the Holy Spirit's leading in our lives?