

Celebration of a New Ministry
October 16, 2019
Trinity, Apalachicola

A couple of weeks ago, Eric sent me a text,
And it went something like this...

OMG...in capital letters about three times...

Oh my God!

I just had Franklin County oysters for the first time...

OMG...they are the best I've ever had!!!

Funny how texting is changing our common language...

we have come up with short cuts, words have become letters...

IMHO, LOL, WYWH, SMH, and, perhaps most used of all...

OMG...Oh my God...

Perhaps some of you used those very letters to text each other after
Eric's first Sunday...

Oh my God!

Perhaps he used them to text his friends when he began to experience the humidity and yellow flies in August...

And those oysters...

Oh my God...

Those three words give expression to something that is beyond words...

While we may use them casually, they almost always are meant to convey a sense of awe, wonder, astonishment, surprise...

They are almost always a response to something that has opened our eyes or hearts or amazed us in some way, even if in a small way...

Or when, in a completely unexpected moment, the veil between heaven and earth is removed,

and we know, in those few seconds,

God really is with us...

Oh my God...

Something like that happened to the good folks in that synagogue that Sabbath service.

They were gathered together, like they had gathered together for years and years.

It was the synagogue Jesus had been brought up in...nourished and raised up in...

Just like Trinity is the congregation you may have been brought up in,
or are now being brought up in ...nourished and raised up in...

It was all so familiar...even the words of the service, and the readings,
they had all heard them umpteen times...

Then into the midst of all that was so ordinary and familiar,
Came another familiar face...Jesus...
But that day, there was something different about him...

He was fresh off of being Baptized and having the Spirit descend upon
him...

And then being driven into the desert for forty days by that same
Spirit...

Overcoming demons and being ministered to by angels..

Then he comes back to his home town synagogue in Nazareth that
Sabbath,

Filled with the power of the Spirit...

He takes the scroll that is handed to him, and begins to read from
Isaiah:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me...

Because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor,
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
And to let the oppressed go free,
To proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" ...

He then says to them,
Today, this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing...

The veil between heaven and earth had been pulled back...
And they were astonished...in awe...They knew the spirit of God was
with Jesus, with them...
in what they heard, in how they heard it.
The Spirit of the Lord was upon them.
It was definitely an "Oh my God" moment.

Like Jesus, we have been given and filled with the gift of the Holy
Spirit...

Like Jesus, the Spirit of the Lord is upon us...

And there are times when we have each experienced it..and we know
it...

Yet, those oh my God experiences are very difficult to really describe...

So we probably rarely share them...

I remember one such moment...and I'm going to share it simply
because it was so ordinary,
Until it wasn't.

It happened a number of years ago,
As I was making my mother's corn pudding recipe.
I was living in Maryland at the time and my parents, who were around
90 years old at the time,
Were living on the coast of Lanark.
And while I knew they would leave this world at some point,
The thought of not having them in this world, even at a distance,
Was hard to imagine for me...I didn't want to think about it...

So that day, I had this beautiful silver queen corn that smelled just like
the corn my father used to grow,
In one hand,
And the wooden corn grater my mother had used and given to me in
the other...
And I was remembering all the times we had made this corn pudding
before,
And all of a sudden...

I don't really have words to fully describe it... but they were present with me, in spirit...

As I stood there at my kitchen sink, my remembering of them was somehow transformed into their presence...

Their presence with me was more real and intimate than anything I had ever experienced even in their physical presence.

It took my breath away, I was so stunned, and surprised and amazed...

Yet that intimate, 20-30 second experience of presence released me from my fear of their dying...

And lifted me to a new understanding of how we really are all a part of one another, in the spirit...

And that nothing can separate us from and in the love of God...

And it gave new meaning to those familiar words we hear every Eucharist...

Do this in remembrance of me...

The Spirit of the Lord is intimately with us...always...

Using whatever moments and occasions...

However familiar and ordinary or unfamiliar and unsettling...

To find ways to release us,

To open our eyes to see with the eyes of the Spirit

To lift us to a risen reality,

To free us from whatever forces and fears hold us captive
To unburden us from whatever weighs heavily on us,

The Spirit is moving through us, praying through us, cooking through us,
breathing through us,
loving through us, singing through us...living through us...
Ministering through us...and it's an effervescent, irrepressible Spirit...
so we just never know when and where and how the Spirit is going to
move...

And you each know that first hand...in your own unique ways...

But I'm guessing the search committee and the vestry never imagined
they would get a letter out of the blue from a priest in Maryland
saying he happened to spend some time in Apalachicola recently,
fell in love with the town, and would be very interested in being a part
of their search.

And I'm guessing Eric, who had lived in the Baltimore area his entire
life,
never imagined that he would, at this point in his life,
be hearing a call to live and be a priest in Apalachicola Fl.

People in Maryland don't even know how to pronounce Apalachicola!

But all of you, together, were open to letting the Spirit move you,
and lead you into the beginning of a new thing...

I hesitate to call it a new ministry....because it's our Risen Lord's
ministry that you have been called into...

Together...

That ministry has been going on in this place for a long time...most
recently with Martha and Donna, and now Eric...

But it will be new, because the Spirit is making all things new...all the
time...

And it will be new because you are entering into a new covenant, and
new ministry together with one another.

The Spirit is and will be doing new things in and through each of you,
and through this congregation...

And you have each been given unique gifts of the Spirit,

Unique graces, if you will, that only you can give...

Some have been given the gift of hospitality,

Some of the gift of music, and voice,

Some the gift of prayer for others,
Some, like St. Luke, the gift of healing,
Some the gift of prophecy...helping others see the needs around them,
Some the gift of presence, of being here, faithfully,
Some the gift of spiritual leadership,
Some the gift of teaching,
Some the gift of preaching...
Countless gifts of the Spirit...
And no matter how small we think our gifts might be,
When we ask and allow the Spirit to animate us,
To animate our gifts...
Those gifts become more powerful than we can imagine.
When the Spirit is animating us,
The smallest of gifts, like that mustard seed,
Will do astonishing things...

And while you have been exercising your gifts all along...
we each, individually, have many gifts that we're not using, or may not
even know about!
You have gifts as a congregation that you probably haven't even
discovered
That's not a criticism, it's just a reality for I'm assuming all of us...

Sometimes, we don't know what we don't know!

There is an abundance of gifts in yourself and in this congregation,
So the beginning of a new ministry is a really good time to
Begin to explore and discover, call forth and awaken the gifts of the
Spirit that are here!

Soon after I got to our old family beach house at St Teresa last
weekend,

The water pump on the well stopped working.

I had no water.

After a quick look, the well repair guy determined that the capacitor
had burned out...

Apparently, this capacitor is what starts the motor on the water pump
each time

The pressure drops below a certain point.

It's the catalyst for the motor that brings up the water and makes it
flow.

So as you begin this new ministry together,

May you each, in your own way, be a capacitor for each other...be that
catalyst...

Look at each other with fresh eyes, and look for the gifts that God has given each of you...

And when you see a gift in someone, affirm it, tell them the gifts you see in them...

Help to awaken and raise up the gifts in each other!

There is a deep and endless well of the Spirit in this congregation and in each of you...

So be capacitors for each other...

Be the catalysts for raising up the countless gifts you've been given and for making them flow

Into and out of this congregation...

And as you do, may you continue to have an abundance of Oh My God moments together.

Whether they are in amazement at what the Spirit is doing,

Or in astonishment at something that's happening that's never been done before,

Or in quiet awe and wonder when you realize, deep in your soul, that the God of all creation,

our Risen Lord...

Is right here in you

Right here with you...

May your life and ministry together be filled with much awe and wonder, love and praise...

And lots and lots of Oh my Gods!

Amen!

Amen...

