"Led By the Spirit"
Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Season of Pentecost, Sunday, May 27, 2018
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Holy Scriptures: Romans 8

I want to live where soul meets body
And let the sun wrap its arms around me
And bathe my skin in water cool and cleansing
And feel, feel what it's like to be new

Where Soul Meets Body

Dr. McCormick was on the faculty of the San Francisco Theological Seminary
the day he found himself in a hurry to drive across the city.
He knew that the shortest distance to traverse across San Francisco
was by way of the city's curvy streets and steep hills.
As luck would have it he found himself driving right behind a blessed soul
who slowed down to crawling speed
the closer he or she drew near to a green light,
for fear that it might turn red.
And guess what? [I bet you saw this one coming.]
Without fail, when they arrived at the cross street the green lights had turned red,
every single time.
McCormick said, *"When you are in a hurry to get across town for an appointment,*
try that on your religion."

As Professor McCormick learned, life is difficult.
Life <u>is</u> difficult.
Those are the first three words in Scott Peck's book, "The Road Less Travelled"
Peck said, *"Life is difficult. This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths.*
It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we transcend it.
Once we truly know that life is difficult
-once we truly understand and accept it-
then life is no longer difficult.
Because once it is accepted, the fact that life is difficult no longer matters."
End quote.

The Spirit of God dwells in us richly,
providing constant support and community and coping mechanisms

that help us accept and transcend the challenges of our daily lives.

Being a spirit-filled soul in the world today does not come easy;
it requires constant attention to detail and the spiritual disciplines.

No wonder we return regularly to worship for a prayer,
a pick-me-up sermon,
a pat on the back,
a praise for jobs well done,
a pause to reflect on the errors of our ways,
a pardon for sins committed
and a partaking of the Bread and Cup
all of which serve to empower us to go forth into the fray, into God's world,
filled and anointed and blessed, **body and soul**.

Being a person of faith in 2018 is tough.
No wonder so many of our neighbors have packed it in,
throwing up their hands and saying, "Fuhgeddaboudit!"
No wonder our neighbors and we ourselves get fed up
with church fights and splits and petty arguments,
with ecclesial divisive behavior and attitudes that serve only
to break up and break down and break apart the Body of Christ.
No wonder so many have chosen what feels easier, cheaper, less taxing
by following their own whims and desires
rather than living into the spiritual disciplines,
disciplines which are more demanding of energy yet also more rewarding.

Where body meets soul is a challenge in any day and age, particularly now.
No wonder that last thing we need is for someone to tell us is how "easy" it is,
how since they can do it so well, then we should be able to as well.
I heard a true story about an art teacher who convinced herself that art is easy,
That since she could do it, surely her students could, too.
So, she fussed at her students, telling them how miserably they failed.
She then described how perfectly she had accomplished the same tasks.
How do you think that went over in the classroom?

We've seen this play out in churches as well.
No wonder congregations tune out and get turned off by preachers
who present themselves as super heroes,
using themselves as prime examples
of spiritual perfection, precision and praxis.
This church on West Ponce De Leon tossed that one out the window a long time ago.

They say congregations figure out their pastor's weaknesses within the first two weeks.
First Christian Church of Decatur figured out my strengths and "growing edges"
so long ago and so well that I've had to work on inventing new ones.

As a human seeking to follow in the ways of Jesus Christ,
I've certainly fumbled the ball on the one-yard line,
left undone those things that ought to be done,
and neglected the rejected, dejected and subjected.
Seriously, living in the Spirit in the world today is difficult.
And we don't need someone telling us it is easy, look at how I've succeeded.
We need someone pointing us to the Spirit of God, who will lead us onward.
No one knows this better than those of us
who have wrestled and struggled **where soul meets body**.
You and I recognize the truth spoken in love
when Paul says we live in the Spirit.
We are led by the Spirit.
We need the Spirit of God; oh, how we need the Spirit.
Without the Spirit dwelling within, I shudder to imagine where I might be.
Life is difficult.

Where soul meets body, there is the Spirit.

The love of God in Christ empowers us,
giving us the fortitude and strength and community
to turn personal tragedies into triumphs of the Spirit.
Victor Frankl survived the Holocaust,
and in 1946 published a groundbreaking book called Man's Search for Meaning.
[We pause to acknowledge that his language is exclusive,
born of a time and age when man was understood to represent humanity.
The meaning of this point he made is meant for all people.]
On the question of suffering, Victor Frankl said:
"Even the helpless victim of a hopeless situation,
facing a fate he cannot change, may rise above himself,
may grow beyond himself,
and by doing so change himself." (p. 147)

We are constantly surrounded and reminded of loss, of tragedies, of suffering.
At the same time, we are witnesses of the beauty of the earth,
of acts of compassion and mercy, of the smiles and first steps of children,
and of souls embodying service above self.

So, let's not be so hard on one another.
Recognize and appreciate that we are all wrestling and struggling
with what being a Christian means
and how we are to live where soul meets body.

Extend grace and peace to each other,
while we can and as often as we can,
while living together on this blue planet spinning in the sky,
where life is difficult
and God is good, all the time.

Where Soul Meets Body

Paul said, in Christ "there is no condemnation." (Romans 8: 1)

In Christ there is community.

Thank God we have this faith to sustain us and move us forward,
together, filled with the grace of God.
Thank God, we have before us
a mighty and meaningful Word to enlighten our journey.

Where Soul Meets Body

Let's explore the Holy Scriptures in depth, for our collective spiritual edification.

Remember what we say here:
we may think we are examining the Bible
only to discern that the Word is examining us.

The 8th Chapter of Romans is a prime offering
of the Apostle Paul's understanding of the Christian life,
one in which soul meets body.
We surmise from Acts 19 that the Epistle to the Romans
was most likely written during the later stages of Paul's life,
sometime between 55-64 AD,
which would mean he crafted it while travelling
through northern and southern Greece on his way to Jerusalem.

Romans 8 is one of the finest chapters in the Holy Scriptures.
Paul invited his listeners to hear the Word of God
in the form of a devotional, as a meditation, as a spiritual tome,
rather than an analytical, hard-nosed systematic theology.
Yet at the core of this Spirit-filled missive and meditation
is an outstanding systematic theology,
one that is so filled with the Holy Spirit
that it would impact the Church of Jesus Christ
for generations and millennium to come.

In the 8th Chapter of Romans,
in Paul's letter to the Christian churches in Rome,
he begins by making an argument to differentiate the spiritual
impact of

the Law of Moses as opposed to the Love of God.
Here he juxtaposes "the inability of the law to produce salvation on the one hand
and God's achievement of salvation for humanity
by sending [Jesus Christ, the Son of God] on the other." [2]

Paul would have been concerned with defining and contrasting Christianity
over and against Judaism and Greek and Roman philosophies.

When God sent the Son, Jesus Christ,
God accomplished what the law and philosophy could not.

By sending Jesus Christ to redeem us,
to show us the way to forgiveness and life everlasting,
in one fell swoop "God…defeated sin and freed humanity
to live freely 'in the Spirit'
under the gracious leadership of the Spirit." [3]

Paul paints a picture of God's gifts to those who connect with Christ in a material world.

Follow Christ, says Paul, and you shall receive:

(Rom. v. 2) A life of freedom from the law of sin and death
(v. 4) A harmonious walk in the Spirit of God
(v. 5) A mind centered on that which pleases God
(v. 9) A life "in" the Spirit, with God as the atmosphere we breathe
(v. 10) A home for the Spirit to dwell
(v. 10-11) A life fully alive, in body and spirit
(v. 13) A life as an adopted, chosen Child of God, as an heir, along with Christ
(v. 17) A life that shares in Christ's sufferings
(v. 24-25) A life of hope
(v. 26-27) A life of prayer
(v. 28-30) A life of assurance
(v. 31-39) A life of conquest over all trials and temptations and enemies of the Spirit [1]

Thanks be to God, through the saving power of Jesus Christ
we are free, free to be, free to live into God's forgiving grace,
free to live into the Spirit,
and with the Spirit,
and to welcome in the Spirit of God who dwells richly in us.

Here is the mystery of salvation:
not only are we called to be in the context of the Spirit,

the gracious gift of God is the Spirit that dwells within us.

Dwell means to stay, to reside, to live as a permanent resident.
The Spirit of God dwells within, lives within,
resides permanently in the whole people of God.

The Spirit's stay is not a fleeting thing, just passing through,
merely a sideways glance, a casual drive by.

The Spirit of the Living Christ is here, within you, to stay.
Our joy and our responsibility,
should we choose to accept it,
is to reach for the God of grace
who wants to have a relationship with you.
Grasp for the Spirit who already graciously grasps for you. [4]

Where Soul Meets Body

Do you think of yourself as an earthly body having a spiritual experience,
or as a spiritual being having an earthly existence?
Paul said to the church in Rome and his words connect with us today:
9 ...*You are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit,*
since the Spirit of God dwells in you." (Romans 8: 9)
9-11 *But if God...has taken up residence in your life,*
you can hardly be thinking more of yourself than of [God].
...For you who welcome [God], in whom [God] dwells
—even though you still experience all the limitations of sin—
you yourself experience life on God's terms.
...With [God's] Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ's! ***[5]***

Where Soul Meets Body

A little boy was admitted to the hospital to have his tonsils removed.
He was so nervous and frightened
that the operating doctor advised the child's parents
to not come hear him until afterward.
When they approached him after the operation,
they expected to find him upset and distressed.
To their amazement he was sitting up in bed,
eager and excited to tell them what had happened.
As they walked in the room he blurted out,
"God was there! I saw God! God talked to me!"
His mom said, *"Well, of course God was there, darling.*
But you did not see God. God certainly did not speak to you."
"Oh, yeah, God was there alright!" insisted the boy.
His dad asked, *"Well, what did God look like?"*
"God was all dressed in green and I could only see bright eyes.
God had a green dress and a green cap and a green face-thing."
"I see," said his dad, *"and how did you know this was God?"*

The boy sat up even taller.
"Well you see, Daddy, there were these three angels all around me
dressed in white and two of them were girl angels and one was a man angel.
The man angel asked me to open my mouth.
He looked in and whatever he saw he called to the one in green,
and he said, 'O God, come and look at these tonsils.'
So, God came and looked in and said to me, 'Don't be afraid. I won't hurt you.'
So, I wasn't a bit afraid
because God was doing the job."

Life is difficult. Accept that reality.

The fact that life is difficult does not fill us with fear or trepidation
because we are filled with the Holy Spirit.

God is on the job; the Holy Spirit dwells richly in you and you and you.

Christ is with you and within you wherever, whenever, however soul meets body.

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!

Extra Material:

"Soul Meets Body"
(Written By: Benjamin Gibbard; Performed By: Death Cab for Cutie)

I want to live where soul meets body
And let the sun wrap its arms around me
And bathe my skin in water cool and cleansing
And feel, feel what it's like to be new
Cause in my head there's a greyhound station
Where I send my thoughts to far off destinations
So they may have a chance of finding a place
where they're far more suited than here
And I cannot guess what we'll discover
When we turn the dirt with our palms cupped like shovels
But I know our filthy hands can wash one another's
And not one speck will remain
And I do believe it's true
That there are roads left in both of our shoes
But if the silence takes you
Then I hope it takes me too
So brown eyes I hold you near

Cause you're the only song I want to hear
A melody softly soaring through my atmosphere
Where soul meets body

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[1] Litany found in Foreman's "The Layman's Bible Commentary, Vol. 21", P. 42)
[2] Soards, Dozeman, McCabe, "Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: After Pentecost 1, Year A" Page 78.
[3] Soards, et al. P. 78.
[4] Soards, et al. P. 79, adapted.
[5] Romans 8: 9-11, The Message.