

November 11, 2018 Ghost Stories Pt. 3 Romans 8:12-17

The promise of the title of this series is that you would be told stories: stories about the Holy Spirit of God, blessing the world, touching the church, calling people...sometimes in very strange circumstances to attend the God who redeems, and who introduces us to peace and joy and hope and love when we least expect it, in fact, when we are tempted to give God no credit at all.

This series began in Genesis chapter 1: the Holy Ghost hovering over the waters even as God began the work of subduing and containing chaos to make the world in which we live, which we see everyday, and for which the modern mind gives God so little credit. We have lived to see a time in which the balance of mankind gives God no credit at all, denying HIS existence, HIS power, HIS love and HIS grace.

In the letter to Timothy we listened to the advice of Paul that we should fan the flame of faith and the presence of the Spirit of God given to us through the laying on of hands. We were reminded that the Holy Spirit in us and around us, guiding us and shaping us as we exercise faith is not a Spirit of timidity. There are times when we do bold things. When we go where the so called wise would fear to tread. I used the example of our own lift project, because at one point I confess, I believed it was impossible for us to achieve. But here we are in the midst of its coming to pass, the money in hand, and our congregational budget showing every indication that we will meet its demands.

Today's lesson in Romans 8 speaks of the very special relationship we have with God...not because we are good...but simply because we believe in Jesus. In fact the portion says very bluntly we should not be afraid of God, of HIS judgement, but pursuing God's will that we should realize we have been adopted into HIS eternal family. Ladies...when the portion says we are sons of God it does not infer you should become boys: It means you are by faith God's children and children of the first order. And men, children adopted into God's family as heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven.

I promised you stories. I have several and they are delicious. Some of you know the hymn, "God Leads His Dear Children Along." As hymns go it is not all that old. It was written in 1903 by a preacher whose name was George Young. He was a trained carpenter. He took his wife to the Midwest of the United States of America. He was a travelling evangelist, promoting revival wherever he was invited to speak and supported by the will and love of his wife. They were never rich in the worldly standards of wealth. But they did put enough money together to buy a piece of ground and George built them a small cottage. When they moved in, they sang "Praise God from whom all blessings flow."

When George and his wife were away conducting worship meetings someone broke in and set fire to the cottage. They lost everything they owned. George Young surveyed the ashes of their lives and made a list of things that could never be taken from him...his family, his faith in Jesus, his ministry, his eternal hope, and based on his reading of these words in

Psalm 23, "HE leads me beside still water. He restores my soul," he wrote the lyrics over a period of several days. It would be delightful if that were the end of the story but it is not.

Years later Dr. Lillenas, a fan of that hymn, decided to track down George Young's widow to learn more of how the hymn came to be written. He found her in a small town in Kansas. He was surprised and upset to discover she was living in the run down Country Poor House. He was upset that the widow of the author of a great hymn about God's guidance should end her life in abject poverty. But this was her explanation to Dr. Lillenas. She said, "One day the dear Lord took my sweet husband home. I have missed him. And I wondered where God would lead me. He led me here." She said, "Every month someone comes into this place to spend the rest of their days. Most of them do not know Jesus. I am having the time of my life introducing them. Isn't it wonderful how God leads us along?" Sometimes on the mountains, where the sun shines so bright/ God leads HIS dear children along. Sometimes in the valleys in the darkest of night. God leads HIS dear children along."

The Holy Spirit is that part of the personality of God who leads us and guides us when we are willing to be led and guided...and sometimes HE leads us there even though we are not willing to be led or guided. Remember Jonah the unwilling evangelist to the city of Ninevah? God leads HIS dear children along.

The Holy Spirit includes us as in the family of God, adopting us as sons and daughters, His children of the highest order.

In 1914 War broke out in Europe. The conflict as a result of the policies of colonization and the building of Empires became known as World War 1. Soldiers came from all over the world to fight in that conflict on the battle fields of Europe. That war would eventually claim 15 million lives. The boys, the men, were often referred to as "the flower of a generation." Where in the midst of war would one find something to say that would reflect the presence of the Holy Spirit? December 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> 1914. Pope Benedict the XV<sup>th</sup> was elected in September of that year. As one of the early acts of his leadership of the Roman Catholic Church he called for a Christmas truce to last a week. The powers that were rejected the idea. Both sides anticipated a quick victory. The idea of combatants "fraternizing" was dismissed as "poor form".

But here is what happened. Private Albert Moren described Christmas Eve as a beautiful moonlit night. He was with the Second Queens Regiment and was quoted in the New York times. Graham Williams of the Fifth London Rifle Brigade was quoted as saying it started like this: "The Germans sang one of their carols. Then we sang one of ours. The trenches were approximately 110 yards apart. They would sing. We would sing. Until we started " O Come All Ye Faithful." They joined in, singing the Latin words Adeste Fidelis. Graham was quoted as saying, "I thought, well this is a most extraordinary thing...two nations singing the same carol in the middle of a war."

When dawn broke, in places German soldiers emerged from their trenches calling out "Merry Christmas" in English. Allied soldiers emerged warily to greet them. In places Germans held up signs... "We No Shoot...You NO Shoot". Over the course of the day troops exchanged gifts of cigarettes, food, buttons and hats. They buried dead comrades. One account mentions a British soldier having his hair cut by his prewar German barber. Another talks of a pig roast. Several accounts speak of impromptu kick-about with makeshift soccer balls. I have placed a reproduction of a photograph from The Life Picture Collection. It is estimated that 100,000 men (about two thirds of the troops in the field participated. It was a holy moment in a ghastly 4 years of war.

This matter of that moment in history should teach us God's Spirit crosses lines that men alone would never attempt. And even enemies are unable to resist the need to respond.

Let us pray;

Lord we give thanks for the relative peace in which we live. We also give thanks for those who have served Canada in times of war, and who in so doing helped to build the nation we now call home. O God pour out your Spirit that catching a taste of the brotherhood of all mankind we might live for others even as you lead us along. In Jesus name we pray. Amen