

Reflections from a United Methodist Pastor

September 20, 2020

Lesson 3

Life in the Spirit

Romans 8:1-11

By F. Belton Joyner

Comparing translations can be a healthy way to explore Scripture, but in the case of today's Focal Passage, I should have left well enough alone. First, I read the New Revised Standard Version and felt okay. The text challenges us not to live according to the flesh (Romans 8:3-9). I can handle that. I eat well. I get regular exercise. (After all, I keep a pedometer in my pocket.) I have no carnal excesses. I am not obsessed with how I look. And I don't judge others by how they look. On a score of living according to the flesh, I am doing pretty well.

Then, I read the Common English Bible. Oops. It did not leave me as much place to hide. This translation speaks of selfishness and being self-centered. At least it did not call me by name. I do judge other's opinions by my own. I choose what I want to do according to how comfortable I am doing it. I even see myself as a model of how a moral life should be lived. (Oh, this is getting worse!) I have a birthday coming up next week and I wonder about the cards and gifts that might come my way. And I am even ready to brag about the one point I scored as a member of the Duke track team "back in the day." When measured by "self-centered," I do not fare so well.

The beeper just went off on my clothes dryer. I'd better go tend to that ... so I won't have to keep on this negative track that describes me so well.

But there is hope. The one who brought Christ Jesus from the dead can also give life where my flesh, my self-centeredness, has denied it (Romans 8:11). Now I am set free to think/do according to the values of the Spirit of God (verse 5). These are the values seen in the incarnate Word of God (John 1:14). These are the values that walked among us in Christ Jesus and which now walk among us wherever the Spirit lives in us (Romans 8:11). These are the values of faith and hope and love, and the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13:13).

Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: "Come, Holy Spirit, move with fresh breath upon the damaged places of my life."

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