

Flying Solo

April 2, 2017

John 14: 23-26 and James 1: 2-5

²³ Jesus replied: If anyone loves me, they will obey me. Then my Father will love them, and we will come to them and live in them. ²⁴ But anyone who doesn't love me, won't obey me. What they have heard me say doesn't really come from me, but from the Father who sent me. ²⁵ I have told you these things while I am still with you. ²⁶ But the Holy Spirit will come and help you, because the Father will send the Spirit to take my place. The Spirit will teach you everything and will remind you of what I said while I was with you.

² My friends, be glad, even if you have a lot of trouble. ³ You know that you learn to endure by having your faith tested. ⁴ But you must learn to endure everything, so that you will be completely mature and not lacking in anything. ⁵ If any of you need wisdom, you should ask God, and it will be given to you. God is generous and won't correct you for asking.

Flying Solo

Pastor John

What comes to mind when you hear the term "flying solo"?

Does this term bring a good or a bad connotation to your

mind? Or maybe it brings both? In this part of the world, in

the country we grew up in, for those here today, the term 'flying solo' often means that we are rugged individuals, able and ready to work hard, to make something of ourselves, to be independent and self-sufficient. We believe that if we want something, we need to work hard to earn it. We place value in a good day's work and in contributing to society. This is the good side of 'flying solo'.

There can also be the not-so-good side of flying solo. Unfortunately, I sometimes relate well to some of this side. Sometimes it means we do not ask for help when we should. True, there are times and places where we need to put our heads down, to work hard, and to persevere. But, there are also times, when pride or stubbornness or greed or ego prevents us from admitting we would be better off if we asked for some help. Many of us will slog through something or do something alone when a few other hands would make lighter work and the work would be better work because of all the gifts that each one helping would bring to the table. We know this, yet we sometimes struggle to ask for help. We don't want to be a burden. We don't want to be a bother. We want all the glory or pay-off for ourselves. We don't think others can do as good of a job as we can. Guilty, guilty, guilty. How about you?

And then there is 'flying solo' in terms of being too much of an individual, of running off on a tangent that shouldn't be run on, of being way out in 'left field' for a cause or thing that we are way too passionate about. Of course, this is never any of us. But we all know 'someone' who is like this. But in reality, these are just a step or two past being a great leader, past being a creative and innovative thinker, past making a significant difference in the world. Sometimes there is a fine line between flying solo in a good sense and flying solo in a bad sense.

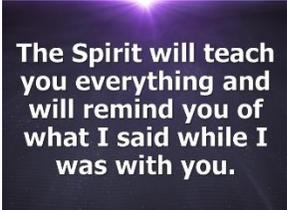


Flying Solo

There is also, of course, 'flying solo' as it applies to our faith. When we think of the term in this context, it is almost always thought of in negative terms. As we talked about two weeks

ago, we need trusted mentors to guide and help us along our faith journey because we best practice our walks of faith in community, learning and growing together. In community, we are supported and encouraged and held accountable. Last week we thought about how, at times, everyone needs help. We talked about how God sends that biker to that desperate mom, about how God sends people into our lives, and about how sometimes we are the people who will be sent by God to offer help and hope in someone else's life. And last week, we also began to talk about how the Holy Spirit intercedes and leads and guides us along our faith journey. So, in terms of flying solo, there is much in our faith traditions and practices to speak against flying solo. In fact, today we will practice one of the most sacred traditions of our faith as we partake in the sacrament of holy communion together.

Today's scripture passage from John begins by reminding us that if we truly love God, then we will obey His commands. But Jesus knew that this would be a challenge. Just as Jesus did two thousand years ago, we too live in and amongst the world. From His time walking the earth, Jesus knew that it would require more than us just remembering what we read in the Bible and trying to live by it. So, Jesus went a step further by choosing to send the Spirit to dwell in our hearts. Out of God's love for us, Jesus declares that, "*we will come to them and live in them.*" By God's abiding presence in each of our hearts, we gain an increasing ability to obey God's commands. Jesus gave the disciples this promise in John 14, verses 26 and 27: "*But the Holy Spirit will come and help you, because the Father will send the Spirit to take my place. The Spirit will teach you everything and will remind*



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you of what I said while I was with you." We touched on this last week as we acknowledged that everyone needs help. The journey of faith is one that can be walked alone, but it is much harder to walk the road of faith alone. We are better together.

In these words, we gain assurance that we do not ever walk alone. God sends us the Holy Spirit to help us, to teach us all we need to know as we take this journey of faith, and to remind us of Jesus' teachings and example. Even in those times when we feel physically alone due to whatever circumstances, we are assured of the presence of God through the Holy Spirit. The Spirit offers much to us. When we feel weak, the Spirit will strengthen us. When we feel like we do not have the words to say, the Spirit will teach us. When we are tempted and the voice of the world is loud, the Spirit will still those other voices and will remind us of the Word to bring us encouragement and support and the strength to stand so that Satan will flee. When we do not even know how to form the words to our prayers, the Spirit will intercede on our behalf and will lift our cause to God. Through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, we are never alone.



Flying Solo

We gain assurances not only through these words from the Bible, but also through our experiences as we learn and grow in our faith. In times when we have felt weak, we have turned our anxiety or fear over to God and we have been raised up. In the "Listen" video for last week, we heard Erron, the fire chief, speak of this. When he was tired and feared that he did not think he had the strength to do more, he prayed to God and found the strength to complete what was at hand. The Spirit

will do the same for each of us as well. When we do not feel like we can enter that situation because we just don't know what to say, we can trust in the Holy Spirit to give us just the right words to say in that time and place.

A while back, one of the men's group guys shared that once he was called upon to visit the hospital to be with a family whose loved one was dying. The church was between pastors and he got the call. He prepared to walk into that room, not knowing what to do or what to say, so he turned to God in prayer. As he entered and spent time with the family, he felt guided by the Holy Spirit. These are but a couple of examples that illustrate the power and presence of the Holy Spirit when we call upon the name of Jesus to be with us. We are told to pray when we are in a time of need. When we obey this command and go to the Lord our God in prayer, God responds. He will not leave us alone. When we are obedient and are following God's will, God will be present. God will provide the strength or the words or the encouragement or whatever we need. As we are obedient time and time again, we come to learn just how faithful God really is when we are faithful too. We go to God more quickly and more often as we grow in our faith and as we learn to trust in God and His promises.

But, when we are not obedient, when we try instead to trust instead in our own power or strength or courage, then we can get in trouble. When we refuse to listen to the ever-present voice of the Holy Spirit, when we ignore the guidance and direction that the Spirit is giving, we can find ourselves lost and adrift.

A man in North Carolina bought a new car with a voice-warning system. ... At first he was amused to hear the soft female voice gently remind him that his seat belt wasn't fastened. ... Edwin affectionately called this voice the "little woman."

He soon discovered his little woman was programmed to warn him about his gasoline. "Your fuel level is low," she said one time in her sweet voice. Edwin nodded his head and thanked her. He figured he still had enough to go another fifty miles, so he kept on driving. But a few minutes later, her voice interrupted again with the same warning.



And so it went over and over. Although he knew it was the same recording, Edwin thought her voice sounded harsher each time. Finally, he stopped his car and crawled under the dashboard. After a quick search, he found the appropriate wires and gave them a good yank. So much for the little woman!

He was still smiling to himself a few miles later when his car began sputtering and coughing. He ran out of gas! Somewhere inside the dashboard, Edwin was sure he could hear the little woman laughing.

People like Edwin learn before long that the little voice inside, although ignored or even disconnected, often tells them exactly what they need to know.

The same is true for us and the voice of the Holy Spirit. We can certainly try and ignore the voice. We can even choose to try and disconnect ourselves from God. We can certainly try to believe the other voices – our own inner voice, the voice

of the world, the voice of our 'friends'. But in the end, we come to the realization that listening to that little voice inside of our heart is always the best choice.

Like Thomas Edison and his invention of this light bulb, sometimes our faith requires persistence and effort and time. You know, Edison did not really invent the light bulb; he invented the first light bulb that was practical and reliable. To find the right filament that would be both durable and inexpensive required the testing of over 6,000 different materials. His team at the 'invention factory' finally discovered that carbonized bamboo was just the right material for the light bulb. So it is with our faith. We do not profess our faith in Jesus Christ and instantly become perfectly mature, faithfully practicing Christians. Our faith requires persistence and effort and time as well.



Flying Solo

Believe it or not, God is patient. And persistent. And faithful. No matter how many trials we go through and no matter how many times we sin, God remains patient and persistent and faithful. And believe it or not, I think at times those trials we go through and those stumbles we make are precisely what helps us to grow in our faith. I do not believe that God brings calamities or tragedies or trials upon us. I cannot reconcile that with the loving God I know. I do believe that life does bring trials and testing and hardship. These things are just part of life that happens. And I do believe that God is saddened and disappointed when we sin. Our sin separates us from God. As I am human, I sin. We all sin. And as I look back over the course of my life, and as you look back over the course of your life, I

can see and you can see how God has been present and walked with us through the trials, testing, tragedies. I can see how God has sought me out when I sin, how the Spirit has worked in me to bring conviction and has led me to repentance. I can see how God has been active in bringing me back into a right relationship with Him. You too can look back over your journey of faith and see how God has been present and has drawn you back to Him. God is patient. God is persistent. God is faithful.

In the book of James, we are told that, yes, we will have trouble in this life.

Reading again, verses two and three, *"² My friends, be glad, even if you have a lot of trouble. ³ You know that you learn to endure by having your faith tested."* James reminds us that

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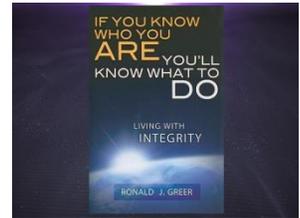
we are to be glad when we encounter trouble. Yes, he says

to be glad. We are to be glad because in the testing we learn to endure and, in enduring, our faith is strengthened. We know from experience that this is true.

Flying Solo

Our faith grows the most in the valleys. In James 1, he goes on to write about the gains we find in the valleys: *"⁴ But you must learn to endure everything, so that you will be completely mature and not lacking in anything."* We endure by clinging to God, by holding fast to His promises, by relying on the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Our walk is always better together. When we walk in fellowship with each other and when we are well-connected to the Holy Spirit that dwells within all believers, then our journey of faith is better. We are not meant to fly solo.

To conclude, I would like to share the story for this week from our "Listen" devotional. It is taken from a book by Ronald J. Greer, called *If You Know Who You Are You'll Do What You Do*.



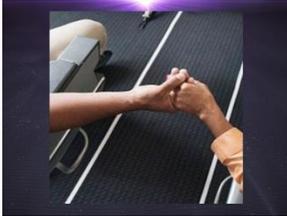
I was sitting in the Atlanta airport, waiting at Gate 32 to board a plane. Zones 1 and 2 were called; I stood, picked up my briefcase, and walked toward the line that was forming. As I passed a row of seats I heard a girl ask her mother, "Do I stand up now?" Something about the girl's voice got my attention. She was developmentally disabled. I kept walking, got in line, and boarded the plane.

I took my place in seat 7C. After I settled in, I looked up. There was the girl, coming down the aisle by herself. I was surprised to see that she was a teenager – she was so petite that she appeared almost frail. The seat in front of mine was hers.

Then "Animal House" boarded. A group of college students came down the aisle and took several rows of seats across from us. They were laughing, joking with one another, and having a great time. But above all else, they were being cool. Cool, you understand, was imperative.

Finally, the plane was pushed back and began taxiing. Ten minutes later the pilot announced that we were cleared for takeoff. He made the final turn onto the runway. I looked up and saw that little head with the brunette hair lean partway across the aisle. I heard the girl say to the college student across from her, "I get real nervous when we take off. Would you hold my hand?"

My eyes riveted on the young man to see what he would do. Holding a stranger's hand is not cool. After an initial nervous blush, he began to smile, and half way across the aisle came that kid's big ol' hand. The girl's tiny hand grabbed it and squeezed.



There they held hands, across the aisle, as our Delta jet was airborne. There they held hands as I stared, also in disbelief, and memorized that sacred moment. I knew I was witnessing a sacrament.

The plane's wheels clunked into place beneath us. She let go of his hand and said something to him. The engines were now so loud, I couldn't hear.

For the next hour and a half he read his Harry Potter book. She listened to her iPod. Then the plane descended as we approached Shreveport. In those few moments, as we anticipated the jolt of the runway, this young man turned to the girl and – as I read his lips – asked, "Do you need to hold my hand?"

Apparently, she said, "No." He smiled and nodded.

We know that at times we try to fly solo. And we know that this is not the best way to journey through life. Life is best lived when we are in connection with God, resting and trusting in His power and presence in our lives, faithfully following the example set by His Son, Jesus Christ, and when we walk alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ. There are many people in our lives that we know who try to fly solo. Part of our call as disciples of Christ is to reach out

across that aisle or fence or driveway or pasture or table. Part of our call is to reach out, to extend a hand, to invite others to come to know the Christ that we profess. May we each answer that call this week. Let us pray.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve

- 1) When have you tried to 'fly solo'? How has God worked in and through your life to build your trust and reliance in Him?
- 2) What experiences have led to the building of faith and trust in God as you have grown in your faith? When has the Spirit led and guided you most?
- 3) Whom do you need to reach out to? Who needs you to 'extend a hand' so that they can begin a relationship with God and with fellow Christians?