

October Newsletter Reflection

October is the time of year when we scan the foliage to look for the seasonal change which will produce the wonderful beauty of fall colors and respite from summer's heat. As we begin this particular October we are still assessing the results of another event often present as summer ends and cooler weather (we hope) comes—the storms called hurricanes. The nature of these storms seems to be changing, but the damage and destruction they cause are still very much a part of their visit. Florence behaved much as did Harvey, Irma and Maria of last year—she and they moved slowly and thus their movement has resulted in widespread damage, more from water than from wind—this time the destruction was to our area of the country. There was a Presbytery sponsored mission trip scheduled to go to Lumberton the week Florence came ashore to repair damage left by Matthew two years ago. Whenever these type events occur, we always hear some frame the event in terms of the disaster being “sent” by God; often this view expresses this as “its occurrence being a punishment for our sins.” The theology of the Reformed tradition declares God's sovereignty over all creation as Creator, Sustainer and Redeemer. This Sovereignty of God is fundamental; is foundational to our understanding of God; just as the other attributes of omnipotence and immortality. These are truths we can rely on. But we as human beings try to make meaning out of all events, large and small in our lives which cause pain and suffering. There is another truth about God which sheds profound light on this issue. Yes, God is Sovereign but more to the point God is LOVE. God's love is the dominant force which underlies the entire Biblical narrative. What that narrative shows is that God is Sovereign even over God's own sovereignty. Scripture tells us God CHOOSES to give up that sovereignty in order to be in relationship with those God created in God's own image—us. The love of God draws us. It creates a yearning within us but never compels us to love in return. God's love reaches out but does not coerce. This means that we have been given choice; theologically the term is “free will”. And out of the choices humankind has made—sin, death, destruction and all the various maladies of life have come. Those who view natural disasters and other catastrophes as being God's Will forget this truth which is also fundamental to our understanding of God. God invites us to be in relationship—over and over again throughout Scripture this is the message. God chose to be in relationship with Abram and with all those who followed in the narrative. Very early in the narrative God makes a promise to Abram and when that promise of the covenant is fulfilled in Isaac, then God expands on that promise to say I will be with you. The new Bible Study for the Women this year is about this promise of God—I will be with you—which is unconditional, which covers all events—past, present and future. It does not say there will be no difficulties on life's journey; that there will not be pain and suffering. It does not say there will be no disasters or catastrophes in the world. The promise is that in all things God will be with us. Jesus, Emmanuel, is literally God with us. And that is the invitation and promise which we can trust when things like Florence happen, or when we have our own personal trials. Jesus came to show us God's amazing love

which surmounts all the difficulties—perhaps not in the way we desire, but in the promise fulfilled that we do not face them alone. The gospel of John tells us that as Jesus spent his last meal with the disciples he gave them a commandment to live so that their life would be a witness to him. He said that they would be known as his disciples by the love that they showed to others. We are called to love as God loves—without coercion, without strings, with only the desire to love and give. When disasters strike they are not sent by God, but God sends us to show his love and walk alongside those who suffer. I have inserted the lyrics of a hymn from Glory to God into the newsletter. As you read those lyrics, think closely on the highlighted words and Jesus’ words that he will abide in us as we abide in him.

Shalom,

Pastor Libby

In the newest Presbyterian Hymnal (Glory to God), there is a hymn entitled *Will You Come and Follow Me* (#726) after the first lyric line. It was originally called *The Summons*. Below you will find the lyrics which describe this relationship to which we are invited—a description of discipleship with Christ:

Will You Come and Follow Me

“Will you come and follow me, if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don’t know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown; will you let my name be known;
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave yourself behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare?
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you let the blinded see if I but call your name?
Will you set the prisoners free, and never be the same?
Will you kiss the leper clean, and do such as this unseen,
And admit to what I mean in you and you in me?

Will you love the ‘you’ you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you’ve found to reshape the world around,

Through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.

Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.

In you company I'll go where you love and footsteps show.

Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.