

Before I share who I am, do you know how many roundabouts it takes for me to get from the interstate to this church...8. At least if it was 7 you might be able to believe God created it or something. However, let me say that out in each of those roundabouts it seemed like the people of Billings are getting pretty good about using them to choose their next direction.

My name is Tyler Amundson and I would like to introduce my family to you. Crystal Amundson my amazing wife. Crystal is a mental health therapist who specializes in play therapy and working with kids and families. She owns her own business called "Relating Play" which will be packed up and moved with us to Billings. We will have been married for 10 years this summer.

Standing with Crystal is our daughter Corinne, Corinne is 7 and will be starting the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade next year. And not standing with them is our youngest Quincy who is 4, she wanted desperately to have a Grandparents weekend, so she stayed back in Helena for a sleepover with her Nana. Please if you would welcome them and thank them for joining me today.

The other thing we should get out of the way is something I have been asked a few times...How old are you? Before I tell you this, I want to remind you that I get to ask any of you how old you are, if I answer it now. If you want to know, then I invite you to say "Amen" when I lift my hands. And all of God's people said...(Lift your hands.)

Got you...so now we are bound by this. I am 32. I was ordained 3 years ago and have been in professional ministry whether clergy or lay ministry in some capacity since leaving High School. I am a child of the Yellowstone Conference. And I received my call to ministry at Convo, a high school retreat held here in Billings in February of 1999. In a roundabout way my call has brought me back to this community to share that deep sense of peace and love I found in that moment.

I grew up in Helena, attended Rocky Mountain College for a year, before being lured to Eastern Washington University by an attractive young woman named Crystal Blade. We got married after our college graduation in 2007 and moved to Denver where Crystal began her career and I attended the Iliff School of Theology, a United Methodist seminary. In 2011, I graduated and was appointed to St. Paul's United Methodist Church in Helena, MT as the Pastor who focused on Young Adult Ministries and Community Missions. During my time there I did ministry throughout Helena, administration at St. Paul's, and most especially work closely with people of all ages.

Before we get too far along, I know many of you are wondering why you won't see me fully here until October 1. This was a decision by the Bishop, Cabinet, and myself, in conversation with Dave Merkel and your SPRC. It was intended to create some time for my family and I to transition here, and most especially for me to complete a transition for the Helena United Methodist Ministries project I have been working on in Helena to create a new sense of community wide ministry with both of our Churches, Covenant and St. Paul's.

Know that during this time for me, my heart is drawn daily closer to the ministry we are to engage in here in Billings together. I have had my moments where I wish I could be here earlier. However, I strongly believe this date will provide time for me to complete my work, so I can be fully engaged and present upon my arrival. Dave and I have already begun to share notes about Shiloh and we will continue to be in conversation weekly, so when I arrive I am up to speed.

As our time together draws closer I know I will begin to be in conversation with more of your leadership, and I hope by the end of this year to have had a conversation with each of you about your hopes and prayers for the ministry we do together.

In the meantime, the Spirit doesn't seem to keep me from learning roundabout all of you. Some of you have had conversations with me

already. However, most of what I have learned of you is from your previous pastors. Minus Don Bailey whom I have met, but don't know well. I have either been a friend to their child, mentored by, or colleagues with all of your previous pastors.

It just so happened when I got the news of my move to Shiloh I had been meeting regularly with Barry Padget, the pastor who worked with some of you to found this church. Barry and I talked about that faithful beginning to your work, he even shared pictures with me. In one he was helping place the cornerstone of this building out front and wore a baby blue suit. Then he told me about a weed patch you all have, and how he used to park their to make sure the city knew it was counted as extra parking. Basically he told me that if I was to do well here I need to dress well(aka Polyester baby blue suits) and park in the weeds. Which the weed things is an extra bonus, cause I get extra exercise when I come inside.

I have a special memory of being here at Shiloh when we burned your mortgage at Annual Conference. And now to add to it I can remember the time I put linseed oil on the wood along raised garden beds in the community garden as I got to do this last week during our Yellowstone Annual Conference mission day.

And now I have the privilege of following the great work of Dave Merkel with Shiloh. A man who I am thankful for in my life for the grace he has offered me in our work together and also the music he has shared with so many. While I will not be able to play the piano and I will need Shiloh's grace because I won't do that like Dave, it is an honor to follow him in ministry with you.

Would you share a moment of thanks for Dave? (Applause)

And now I have a request of you, as I prepare to be your Pastor, your spiritual leader and support you all in continuing to build this community of faith.

As I have read through some of the preliminary work John Pugh has been doing and in my conversations with many of you. I have noticed something. You seek to reach new people for our ministry together. I have seen young people listed as one priority, but I also want to say that we as disciples of Jesus are called to invite all people to join us, all ages especially.

In my work I have found that young and old both have one thing in common. A deep want to experience God's Holy Spirit, that Spirit that shares Love, Peace, Hope and Joy of Jesus with anyone who wants to feel it.

In a roundabout way we are all looking for direction from God in our lives.

Over this summer I am going to be in prayer, asking God, "How can I best be a pastor and guide to the people of Shiloh in our work together?"

I want to invite you all to be in prayer over the summer too. Each month I will be writing you to invite you to pray with God over a different question. You will have an opportunity to share what you hear in prayer through letters, emails, video recordings and many other ways.

The first question I want to ask you to pray over is:

What is your prayer for Shiloh?

We are going to take a minute to pray before we even start worship and during that prayer I am going to ask you to share your prayers for Shiloh out loud. If you feel comfortable sharing then, please do. If you would rather write them down, send me a letter, or email me you can do that too. And I would encourage you to pray this question over the next few weeks and see what comes to you.

There will also be a chance after worship to share your prayer for Shiloh on a video camera that is set up in the hall. Just stand in front of it, make sure you can see yourself in the little screen and say a few words about your prayer for Shiloh. The more people that use it, the better because it will help shape some of the work we do in sermons this fall.

For now would you pray with me and when I ask share your prayers for Shiloh out loud.

(Prayer)

Greet each other.

*Shiloh United Methodist Church*

John 14:15-21

Rev. Tyler Amundson

May 21, 2017

*Spirit Living*

There was a man once who was looking for direction. He had heard that you can use the bible for said direction by opening it up to a random page and God would give you a quick answer in the reading you find.

He opened the Bible and found Matthew 19:21,  
“<sup>21</sup> Jesus said, “If you want to be complete, go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor. Then you will have treasure in heaven. And come follow me.””

Not satisfied this was the answer to his problems, the man thought, “I must have done it wrong, let me try again.”

Then he turned to Luke 10:37 and found the phrase “...go and do likewise.”

Exasperated the man tried one last time and found Proverbs 8:33,  
“Listen to instruction, and be wise; don’t avoid it.”

Our scripture today comes from the gospel of John, in this passage Jesus is letting his disciples know that even though he won’t be around them in the same way, God’s Holy Spirit will be.

John 14:15-21 Common English Bible (CEB)

<sup>15</sup> “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. <sup>16</sup> I will ask the Father, and he will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. <sup>17</sup> This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can’t

receive because it neither sees him nor recognizes him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be with you.

<sup>18</sup> “I won’t leave you as orphans. I will come to you. <sup>19</sup> Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Because I live, you will live too. <sup>20</sup> On that day you will know that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you. <sup>21</sup> Whoever has my commandments and keeps them loves me. Whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”

The man from the beginning of our message today, the man who opened the Bible randomly to see where God would guide him was taking part in an act that I didn’t have a name for until this last week, “Biblomancy.” Biblomancy sounds like a crime you can get prosecuted for. It is not. This man’s practices of faith were essentially like the magic 8 ball approach to faith filled living. Random and totally a game of chance.

Jesus is talking about a different approach to faithful living. He is sharing with his disciples that even though he won’t physically be with them, God’s Spirit always is and has been. He is inviting them into spirit living, a practice of living that draws them to listen for God’s nudge, or call in our life. He is also giving them instructions on how they can best prepare themselves to find that steady spirit of God.

Often we treat faith like biblomancy treats the bible, we seek God at random as some sort of fortune telling device to relieve our fear of what comes next. Jesus says in this passage, “Don’t live that way, instead live love and you will feel the Spirit of God and it will help you live through your fear.”

When I was, younger I went on a mission trip to Mexico. Each day we would travel into town from the church camp we stayed at so that we could complete service projects in the city of Tecate. One day when we

were riding into town we were stuck behind a long line of cars on the two-lane highway. Suddenly our drive moved into the other lane and began speedily passing all these cars. This would have been fine except he was doing this on a blind corner, meaning we could not see around the corner to know if another car or even a huge truck was coming at us. I remembered my insides feeling like mush as I experienced what felt like a death defying moment. I remember the look on the chaperones faces and I am sure they felt no different in that moment.

Life feels like this sometimes, it can feel like we are passing cars on a blind corner. We wonder if we are going to get hit, or face consequences of what is coming head on at us. Usually these moments happen when we least expect that we are forced by circumstance to pull out of the line of cars that we have been driving along with. A sudden medical diagnosis makes you feel like you are going through treatments you never expected. A relationship shifts without any notice to you and you have to make decisions about what is healthy relationship look like for you moving forward, whether by being hurt, parenting surprises, a surprise at work, or any number of relationship alterations. Perhaps life doesn't feel complete and you are called for a new adventure, whether that is travel, an experience, or just changing your hair.

A life of faith can help us through all of these kind of life challenges, the question becomes, "How do we practice our faith to help us through these moments?"

Let me tell you something we learned about our van driver that day. He had a two-way radio in his hand and if I had known Spanish my insides would have felt a little less like mush as he made the blind corner pass. The second van we were traveling with had passed on a straightaway, that was not blind. They were letting our driver know

that even on that blind corner there were no cars coming the other direction. Our driver knew we would be safe based on his trust of his friends ahead of him.

Now I am not advocating recklessly passing blindly on the highway between Laurel and Red Lodge as a new faith practice, and I am not saying our drivers were in the right that day in Mexico. I am suggesting that blind corners in life can be a little less gut wrenching if we learn the language of faith, of spirit living, so that life's blind corners can be taken without feeling totally paralyzed by fear.

Saint Augustine who lived in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> century had a prayer for spirit living that goes this way:

### **Holy Spirit Prayer of Saint Augustine**

Saint Augustine (354-430) created this poetic prayer to the Holy Spirit:

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit,  
That my thoughts may all be holy.  
Act in me, O Holy Spirit,  
That my work, too, may be holy.  
Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit,  
That I love but what is holy.  
Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit,  
To defend all that is holy.  
Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit,  
That I always may be holy.<sup>1</sup>

Augustine is inviting us to be holy, and when he says Holy he means a sense of keeping our thoughts, work, heart, passion, justice, and focus

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/prayer/traditional-catholic-prayers/saints-prayers/holy-spirit-prayer-of-saint-augustine>

on freeing us from fear by connecting us with God's love. Jesus in our scripture suggests how we might do this work right at the beginning of our passage. Jesus invites us to follow his commandments, and his overarching commandment in our life is to love God and to love one another.

In Colossians 13:12 we are reminded of how we are to clothe ourselves as people of Christ. Paul write we should clothe ourselves with kindness, compassion, humility, meekness, and patience. Each of these things is a tool to follow Jesus commandments and to follow spirit living. If we dig a little deeper In Colossians within the Greek it is clear that this change we bring is an internal clothing that needs to happen, the writers of the Bible know that Sprit living is soul work, deep transformational work. Folks, that kind of work is not easy to do, but obviously, the writers of the Bible think it is worth the time. They knew it would not be as easy as taking a pill, or opening to a random verse of scripture. This is why the Christian tradtion has worked so hard to develop practices of prayer, meditation, worship, sacrament, and justice is to help us follow this commandment. Jesus knew it was hard work and that it was worth the time, so that God's loving kingdom might be made known to more and more of creation through the work of the people.

There's a story about a boy and his father who were walking along a road when they came across a large stone. The boy said to his father, "Do you think if I use all my strength, I can move this rock?" His father answered, "If you use all your strength, I am sure you can do it." The boy began to push the rock. Exerting himself as much as he could, he pushed and pushed. The rock did not move. Discouraged, he said to his father, "You were wrong. I can't do it." His father placed his arm

around the boy's shoulder and said, "No, son. You didn't use *all* your strength—you didn't ask me to help."<sup>2</sup>

Soul work, spirit living is hard work and we know it is worth it because it leads to living through our fear and into new life. Remember always that you don't do this alone because this work happens in loving relationship with your neighbors, your church, your friends, your loved ones, and most of all with God.

A Sunday school teach once was describing the Holy Spirit to her class. She explained how God's Spirit was like a wind, blowing through that upper room where the Disciples experienced it on Pentecost. Then she asked the class, "Would someone describe what wind is?"

A precocious student piped up, "It is like air, but pushier."

Pushier air is the same Holy Spirit in Joel 2:28 which embodies God's intention of Spirit Living (CEB):

After that I will pour out my spirit upon everyone;  
your sons and your daughters will prophesy,  
your old ones will dream dreams,  
and your young ones will see visions.

May we all learn to dream and see visions of God's kingdom in our ministry together, God's prayers and grace be with you as we ready for the journey we will take together. People are hungry to feel the peace, joy and love of Jesus, may we be a people who carry that Spirit into the world, so others can join us in the Spirit Living that Jesus describes in our scriptures.

Amen

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<sup>2</sup> Wolpe, David J. from *Teaching Your Children About God*