

## Union Methodist Church

Sermon Outline: **"My Sheep Know and Hear My Voice, and Follow Me"**

### **Part 2: To Fleece or Not to Fleece**

September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Pastor Michael Larbi

Readings: **Judges 6:9-16; John 10:1-11, 14, 27-28**

## 1. RECAP - Foundations: New Birth, Work of the Holy Spirit

- **Be Born Again, Making Jesus Lord**

"Very truly I tell you, **no one can enter** the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. **Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit.**" John 3:3-5 NIV

When we receive Jesus and believe in him for our salvation **our inner being (our spirit) is reborn by the Spirit of God. Some call this regeneration.** This is what it means to be born again:

- Our spirit is transformed by the Holy Spirit
- We are marked with the Holy Spirit as a seal in Christ.

**"When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance ..."** Ephesians 1:13-14 NIV

- **Making Jesus Lord**

After we become born again, we should genuinely make Jesus the Lord of our lives. This simply means giving Jesus the final say in everything.

**"He [Jesus] died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them."**

2 Corinthians 5:15 NRSV

## 2. The Inner/Inward Witness - the Primary Way the Lord Leads Us

How do we know we are Christians?

**"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God"** Romans 8:16 NKJV

This is called the Inner or Inward Witness.

One of the most important roles The Holy Spirit is to play in our lives is to lead us.

**"... those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God"**

Romans 8: 14 NIV

Jesus said: **"the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything"** John 14:26 NRSV

"Now **we have received**, not the spirit of the world, but **the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God.**" 1 Corinthians 1:12 NKJV

### 3. **To Fleece or Not to Fleece: Should a Christian be led by fleeces?**

To understand what a fleece is in obtaining guidance from God, think back to the story of Gideon in Judges 6, a portion of which we heard read to us this morning.

- **Gideon and the Fleece of Wool**

"Gideon said to God, "If you will save Israel by my hand as you have promised— 37look, **I will place a wool fleece on the threshing floor. If there is dew only on the fleece and all the ground is dry, then I will know that you will save Israel by my hand, as you said.**" 38And that is what happened."  
Judges 6:36-38 NIV

**Gideon's context** (all in Judges 6) is important to bear in mind:

- Israel was experiencing oppression from their enemies:  
1The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, and for seven years he gave them into the hands of the Midianites
- The Lord had already sent a prophet to Israel to speak to them  
7When the Israelites cried out to the Lord because of Midian, 8he sent them a prophet, who said..."
- The Lord sent an angel to Gideon  
12When the angel of the Lord appeared to Gideon, he said, "The Lord is with you, mighty warrior."
- ***Gideon had already been told several times by the Lord what to do, but he wanted further proof ... is the Lord's word to us not sufficient?***

There are important differences between Gideon and his times in Israel, and the New Testament Christian.

- Gideon did not have the born-again experience, the witness of the Holy Spirit, and the direct leading of the Holy Spirit, as we have today.
- Gideon did not have the whole canon of scripture as we have today.
- There are situations in which we already know what the Lord wants us to do from the scriptures.
- *We are in a much better place to receive clear direction today than Gideon did. **We are not to be led by fleeces but by the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:14)***
- *It's alright to want to test whether something you are getting is truly from the Lord, but the way to do so is primarily with the scriptures.*

- **Comparison: Zechariah's Experience**

Luke 1: 5In the time of Herod king of Judea there was a priest named Zechariah, who belonged to the priestly division of Abijah; his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron. 6Both of them were righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord's commands and decrees blamelessly. 7But they were childless because Elizabeth was not able to conceive, and they were both very old.

8Once when Zechariah's division was on duty and he was serving as priest before God,... 11 an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right side of the altar of incense.

12When Zechariah saw him, he was startled and was gripped with fear. 13But the angel said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zechariah; your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you are to call him John.

...

**18Zechariah asked the angel, "How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years."**

**19The angel said to him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news. 20And now you will be silent and not able to speak until the day this happens, because you did not believe my words,** which will come true at their appointed time." Luke 1 NIV

Let's compare Zechariah & Gideon & Mary.

Why was it not okay for Zechariah to ask for proof, or use a “fleece”?  
Unlike Gideon,

- Zechariah was a priest who was “righteous in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commands and decrees blamelessly.”  
In other words, he knew God and the God’s word intimately and walked with God.
  - Zechariah was not a newbie in the things of God.
  - As a priest he was well grounded in the faith - he should have known better than what he did.
- **Comparison: Mary’s Experience**  
Compare Zechariah’s case with that of Mary when she was told she was going to have a baby though she was a virgin and wasn’t married.

Luke 1:34 **“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?”**  
**35 The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.** So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. 36 Even Elizabeth your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be unable to conceive is in her sixth month. **37 For no word from God will ever fail.”**  
**38 “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May your word to me be fulfilled.”** Then the angel left her.”

Mary asked a legitimate question.

“How will this be ... since I’m a virgin?” is a very different question from “How can I be sure of this?” that Zechariah asked.

The angel did not get upset with her.

- **Caution is Important - the bad shepherd wants to destroy us**  
Jesus’s words must be borne in mind at all times:  
**“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”**

John 10:10 NIV

#### 4. **Living Sacrifice: Testing, Knowing, and Doing God's Will In Every Situation**

In determining and testing what God's will and direction is in every situation, the starting point is what we already know the Lord has said. Where do we find this? In the scriptures! This is why the scriptures are critical to a life led by the Holy Spirit. It is the same Holy Spirit who inspired the scriptures.

- **A Refusal to Conform to the Patterns of this World & Mind Renewal**

"Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind." Romans 12:2a NIV

- **Test & Approve what God's Will Is**

"Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." Romans 12:2b NIV

- **Live by the Word**

Jesus quoted and affirmed what Moses said:

**"It is written,**

**'Man shall not live by bread alone,  
but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'**

Matthew 4:4 NKJV

The Lord gave Joshua the unfailing path to follow:

**"This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth;  
you shall meditate on it day and night,  
so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it.  
For then you shall make your way prosperous,  
and then you shall be successful."**

Joshua 1:8 NRSV

I first saw this scripture one early Sunday morning in August 1980, as a teenager at a Christian summer camp. The preacher, the late Rev. Bertril Bird from Trinidad and Tobago, summed it up this way:

"Control your mouth, control your mind, control your actions with the Word of God and you shall be successful."

This has been an indispensable scripture in my Christian walk with the Lord.