

The Holy Spirit as GPS

Good morning, happy Mother's Day and welcome to the 6th Sunday of Easter here at First Presbyterian Church. It is called the 6th Sunday of Easter because Christ's resurrection is too amazing for just one Sunday; it takes seven to tell the whole story! This is just one of the many things I learned in preparing for the sermon today.

For those of you who don't know me, I'm Kathleen Gardner, a wife, mother, daughter, deacon here at church and also an educator in Las Cruces for over 30 years. As a teacher, I had the pleasure of helping students make sense of texts in my English class as well as create news articles in TV broadcasting and craft their own stories in creative writing. However, despite my abilities to aid others in making meaning, the scriptures I share today were often a challenge and I felt I needed a guide in this process, something or someone to show me the way and get me to the correct destination.

Once upon a time, not that long ago, Rand McNally was a guide I used. Some of you may remember the Rand McNally atlas of the United States, folded carefully and tucked in the glove box of the car, or maybe even the larger spiral bound version that had a page per state, with some of the larger states taking up a few pages to show you everything you needed to know. This handy tool was critical for cross country road trips, but was most beneficial when the driver had a co-pilot who could read the map, reference the correct highway, and then tell the driver when to exit, ideally in advance of the offramp. Getting the correct timing of the information from the co-pilot to the driver could make or break a trip; too late on the call and you're trying to find the next place to turn around and try again, often with some vocal frustration from both parties.

From maps in a car to rockets in space, a lot has changed in how people use tools to get to a destination, whether on earth or in the air. In 1978, the global positioning system, or GPS, was officially developed in conjunction with the US military, effectively guiding satellites from the ground through a navigation system. This technology developed rapidly and GPS has today saved consumers an estimated 52 billion gallons of fuel and one trillion fewer vehicle miles. All because the information coming to drivers is accurate and timely.

So, how does this connect with our scripture passages today? Well, what I want to offer is that we have a version of GPS in our daily lives. However, the GPS I'm speaking of is God's Positioning System, a spiritual navigation system to help us. Let's look at our first passage. In our meditation earlier in the service, we read from Acts. In this section, Paul is speaking to the people of Athens. He says,

“From one ancestor he made all people to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, so that they would search for God and perhaps fumble about for him and find him--though indeed he is not far from each one of us.”

What a relief! There is nothing arbitrary or haphazard about God's Positioning System. He “allotted the times of existence and boundaries of the places we would live.” That's pretty amazing. God knew we would “fumble about for him and find him.” He has a clear plan and a way to get through all of our challenges in life. This is great! I love that God didn't want us to wander around lost, and he also knew we would need him to steer our path and lead us in the right direction.

But how do we get God's Positioning System? Where does this come from? The Holy Spirit is the key to this. In John chapter 14, Jesus is telling the disciples that though he is leaving, they will not be alone. He says to them, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever." What a gift! Unlike your car keys, wallet or phone, you can never misplace the Holy Spirit. God's Positioning System is with you always. As Paul says, "indeed he is not far from each one of us."

From our readings today, I believe there are four steps to use our Heavenly GPS, God's Positioning System.

1. Access it by asking

2. Activate it by listening

3. Admit we need help

4. Advocate for others

First, we gain access to God's Positioning System by asking for directions. Sometimes our petitions are clear. "Lord, please help me." Sometimes, our asking is vague, "Lord, I don't know what to do, but I know you do." Either way, we make our requests and our heavenly GPS is there to listen and give us the plan, the correct route. Matthew 7, verse 7 says, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." Alright, step one.

Now, how do we activate our GPS, God's Positioning System? **This is the second step;** we have to listen. This may seem easy, but it can be difficult and it requires us to be intentional. Last week we learned about the value of listening. In our scripture, Samuel heard what he came

to know was the Lord speaking to him. On the third call from God, Samuel, with guidance from his mentor Eli, finally responds and says, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

Merriam Webster defines “listen” as a verb, meaning, “ to pay attention to sound; to hear something with thoughtful attention; to give consideration; to be alert to catch an **expected** sound.” Ok, this helps. There are things I can DO to activate God’s Positioning system. I can pay thoughtful attention, with consideration, and be alert because the sound is expected. I know it’s coming; I’m anticipating a reply. Sounds easy, right? Ask the Holy Spirit for help and then listen carefully to the plan. Got it.

But we’re often stubborn. It’s God’s Positioning System, not Our Positioning System. We don’t like the route God has for us. We don’t want to go through the detours or the construction that shows up along the way. So we start to question the plan before us. We wonder:

Didn’t God see this coming?

I saw it? Didn’t He?

How could I have lost all this time on a side road when I believe there was a straight path?

Where am I going?

What is the Holy Spirit saying to us? This is where our work lies. **Here’s step three.**

“Recalculating” In one iteration of early GPS, I vividly remember the computer generated voice of our navigating system scolding us for driving in a direction that didn’t match the pre-determined route. The system would take the current coordinates and directions and come up with a new plan based on our driving decisions. Though not sassy or condescending as

our GPS lady, who we named Shirley, was when she spoke to us, I believe we still have that “recalculating” function in God’s Positioning System. God takes our choices, our actions, and still uses it for good. According to Romans chapter 8, “...the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God. And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” Remember, like I said earlier, here’s the work:

What are we supposed to learn from this perceived “loss of time” where our plan didn’t line up with God’s plan?

What are we supposed to let go of or turn away from in order to travel better with God’s Positioning System?

We might make a wrong turn or choose a different path, but if we admit we need help, God will be there for us. There is a lesson to be learned from every situation and every experience. We were positioned here for a purpose.

Finally, when we meet others on our way, we need to **advocate**. **This is step four, advocate for others.** Many of us are blessed to know people in our lives who are part of God’s Positioning System. Mother’s Day celebrates our own mothers and those women in our lives who served as mothers to us, some of our first guides in life who loved us and advocated for us. Some of the other people in our GPS are our friends, the “angels among us,” who have come to us in our times of need and provided love and support on our journeys. Remembering the sweet

souls in our lives who have cared and nurtured us reminds of the good in our world and our role in it.

Sharing the Good News makes you part of God's Positioning System. We are all part of His plan. When we share our faith and our stories, we show others how Christ made a way for us, lead us through a valley, or shepherded us for a season, and never left us. As we receive help from the Holy Spirit, we must also pass it on, pay it forward; we have to act on it. What we do brings our lives full circle.

Father Michael Alello said,

“Faith is more than words or feelings—it is a lived response to God's love. True belief moves us to act: to serve, to forgive, to speak truth, and to love others in tangible ways. Scripture reminds us in James 2:17 that ‘faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.’ Our relationship with Christ is not meant to be passive; it calls us out of comfort and into mission. Every prayer, every act of kindness, every step of obedience becomes a living testimony of the Gospel.

Our challenge is to see the person today who could benefit from our help. So, let us go out and live a life of service, guided by God's Positioning System, knowing the Holy Spirit will never leave us. May we ask for His guidance, listen to His word, make changes when we need to, and help others as we serve in Christ's name. Amen.