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Integrating the 6 Streams of Spirituality

I am deeply indebted to Richard Foster and his book *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* which served as the key resource in the writing of this sermon. One will see the influence and insight of Foster throughout the sermon.

Last weekend I was on a scrapbooking retreat. My goal of the weekend was to create a digital scrapbook of our family summer's vacation to Blackwater Falls State Park in West Virginia. Part of my task was to sort through 768 photos, all taken within a 9 day period (yes, I averaged 85 photos a day!). Here is a picture of that trip (projected on the screen). Now, this photo is just a snapshot. It doesn't tell you everything about the trip. You can't take this picture and write a complete narrative of what we did this week and what it was like and what memories were created. However, this picture is part of the entire experience. This picture is truth. This picture tells a narrative. This picture provides a lens into what our week was like. This lens, this snapshot is needed. In a similar way, each of the six streams of spirituality as outlined by Richard Foster are needed for the full picture of God's kingdom come. Each stream on its own is valid, truth, significant, and not the full picture. They each are only a significant snapshot. Only one lens. It is up to us, the church, the followers of Jesus, to take this snapshot and overlay it with this snapshot and then another and another and another until we begin to get the fuller expression of God's kingdom, fuller picture and narrative of who is Jesus and therefore who are we called to be.

In our time together this morning we have several objectives. First, we desire to see yet again how each of the six streams are able to be traced back to the life of Jesus. Secondly, I desire to briefly review each of the streams and highlight the strengths and gifts that each stream brings to our own spiritual journey, our life together at Waterford, and its impact for the broader church. And finally, I ask that as the morning progresses we continue to consider which of the

streams we most resonate with, and which streams do we need to grow in ways we incorporate, value, and celebrate them within our own spiritual journey and within the church. This week I happened to sit at a round table in our nurture wing to write this sermon. As I sat there I envisioned each of these streams pulling up a chair and sitting at the table with me. What I was overcome with was an awareness of the complexities of bringing six diverse viewpoints, theologies, practices, and lens to one table. While at the same time I experienced deep joy of the delightful and delight-filled diversity of the six streams. As I sat at that table it became my prayer that at Waterford we will have and celebrate individuals from each of the streams for without one of the streams we are missing a significant lens in which to see ourselves, each other, and ultimately Jesus. That prayer continued to a song, bind us together God with cords that cannot be broken. Bind us together amidst our differences and in spite of the complexities. Bind us together so we can be a better representation of you and your kingdom.

Each of these streams originate with Jesus. This morning we want to highlight that significant foundation by going on a journey together through the gospel of Matthew. I could have chosen to simply find passages throughout the New Testament that would emphasize Jesus in each of the various streams. However, that method could have brought along the temptation to discredit one of the examples simply because “Well you know that is just Mark, or just Luke, or just John and they only ever see Jesus within that one stream!” So instead today we will journey through the gospel of Matthew and stop at six spots along the way to review the ways Jesus too was formed and found within each of the streams. So I hope that you wore good walking clothes and shoes for our journey, and I hope that you ate your Wheaties this morning because unless you came prepared to stay until five pm we are going to be jogging on this path to each of the six spots along the way. The order of the streams today will not match the order that we studied

them, nor the order in which Foster addresses them. Instead, they will come in the order of the snapshots in Matthew. To that end I invite you to turn in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 1.

It seems fitting to begin Jesus' life at the beginning, at his birth. Here we are reminded of the incarnational stream - the stream of sacramental life that focuses upon experiencing God as truly manifest and active in daily life. God decides to reveal Godself to humanity through the birth of a baby. We are on the cusp of Advent when we will join together in expectantly waiting for the arrival of Jesus. Jesus' birth narrative gives tangible feet, arms, hair, and skin to God as Jesus' incarnational story invites us to see the humanity of God as revealed in Jesus. In Jesus' humanity then, we read the promise and amazing reality that God came near to us, and continues to come near to us in our daily life.

Pastor Katie reminded us a couple weeks ago about the strengths of this specific stream. The gift of the incarnational stream to our spiritual journeys, to Waterford, and to the broader church is that it keeps us rooted in daily life while giving meaning to our work as we celebrate that we each are called by God to be where we are. In our living, our breathing, our working, our washing dishes, our exercising, our loving, our reading, our walking, we belong to God and God, Immanuel, is with us.

Back in the gospel of Matthew turn over a couple pages to chapter three beginning in verse thirteen. Here we find Jesus in the Jordan river as he is baptized by John. Here we see Jesus fully within the charismatic stream which focuses upon empowering the gifts of the Spirit and nurturing the fruit of the spirit. Beginning in verse thirteen we read:

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?"

Jesus replied, "let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented.

As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on

him. And a voice from heaven said, “This is my son, whom I love, with him I am well pleased.”

“Whether or not we see the heavens bursting open, the Spirit of God descends upon believers today, just as it did upon Jesus at the Jordan. And that Spirit equips us to carry out our particular calling within the larger mission of God’s people in the world.”ⁱ And if we keep reading into chapter four we also read “Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” Jesus is unleashed into the world after he has received the anointing of the Spirit and then he obeys the leading and guiding presence of that Spirit.

The gift of the charismatic stream to our spiritual journeys, to Waterford, and to the broader church is that it corrects our impulse to domesticate God while freeing us from an anemic religion as we are challenged to experience spiritual growth in and by the work of the Spirit. In Matthew we see Jesus experiencing the anointing of the Spirit as well as striving to live life by following Spirit’s leading.

Finally then we continue here in chapter four as we read of Jesus’ experience of being tested in the wilderness. Here we see Jesus emerging within the Holiness Stream which focuses on the inward re-formation of the heart and the development of holy habits. In this text Jesus resists the devil who presents him with the temptation of social, economic and political power. In each instance Jesus has a ready response that articulates his groundedness in his identity as the Son of God.

In the next chapter, chapter five, we begin to read the significant text known as the Sermon on the Mount. Taken together, the temptation of Jesus and the extensive teaching by him, we have the most complete example and teaching on how right action flows from the wellspring of a right heart.ⁱⁱ The Sermon on the Mount is a call to full costly discipleship as it is also a call to obedience. Within this holiness stream we hear the call to continue to experience

inner transformation so that we continue to look and act and function more and more like Jesus. Within this stream we just keep praying “Lord, I am fondly earnestly longing into thy holy likeness to grow!”

The gift of the holiness stream to our spiritual journeys, to Waterford, and to the broader church is that it invites us to an ever deeper formation to reflect God to the world around us as we yield ourselves to the process of inner transformation that begins with our hearts.

Together we now sit at a round table with the Incarnation, Charismatic, and Holiness Streams. I say with joy, thank you God for each of these streams, each of these snapshots of lenses into who you are and who you have called us to be. As we name the gifts they bring we join our voices in prayerfully asking God to bind us together with cords that cannot be broken.

Part 2:

We pick up our sermon in Matthew chapter eleven as we witness the ways Jesus is embodied in the social justice stream of spirituality which focuses upon justice and shalom in all human relationships and social structures. We should easily recall how in chapter three John recognized who Jesus was at his baptism. And yet now we read that John needs additional confirmation or affirmation of who exactly this Messiah is and what he came to do. So John, in prison, sends his disciples to Jesus to ask him, “Are you the one who was to come” you know, it’s like John is asking “Are you the real deal? Are you THE messiah?” Or, “Should we expect someone else.” As in, “You are not THE one.”

Jesus gives a fascinating response. He responds by “directing attention to the fruits of his ministry, that is, the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them...these are the descriptions of the jubilee year enacted in Jesus’ ministry. We know that Jesus has done all these things because we have witnessed his work throughout Galilee.”ⁱⁱⁱ Jesus doesn’t give a direct answer, instead he invites John to look at the ways his life and ministry have intersected with the needs of those around him and with whom he has come in contact with.

Just last week Pastor Neil articulated that the gift of the social justice stream to our spiritual journeys, to Waterford, and to the broader church is that it calls us to live in just social relationships while enabling us to make faith and church life more real as we connect the personal with the social. And so we add social justice to the table with incarnational, charismatic, and holiness. Bind us together...

Turn with me now to Matthew chapter fourteen, beginning in verse twenty-two. This text should sound familiar to you as this was our Dwelling in the Word text in August when we sat

with this text over four consecutive Sundays. It comes right after the well-known story of the feeding of the five thousand. In verse twenty-two we read:

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray.

Here we see Jesus dwelling within the contemplative stream. In the midst of busy ministry and a plethora of demands we see Jesus making time and space once again to go off by himself to be in silence with and before God. It is here in Jesus' rhythm of engaging with ministry and then engaging in silence with God that we detect his utter dependence on God. The contemplative stream, also called the prayer-filled life focuses on the steady gaze of the soul upon the God who loves us.

The gift of the contemplative stream to our spiritual journeys, to Waterford, and to the broader church is that it forces us beyond merely a cerebral religion as it stresses the centrality of prayer in our life with God. This stream keeps saying to us "Fall in love with Jesus over and over and over again."^{iv}

Finally then I invite you to turn to the very end of Matthew in chapter twenty-eight as we find Jesus stresses the significance of the evangelical stream which focuses upon the proclamation of the good news of the gospel. Beginning in verse sixteen we read what is commonly called the Great Commission:

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worship him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

As we heard within the liturgical dance, the evangelical stream is a life founded upon the Living Word of God, the written Word of God, and the proclaimed word of God. Here in the

Great Commission Jesus instructs his disciples to go make more disciples of all nations. The Greek word is to make disciples, not just converts, but ones who join the journey of following after Jesus. To do this we are to teach, to tell, to share what we have heard and learned and received. We should also keep in mind that this great commission comes after the resurrection and therefore we also serve as witnesses to this transformative event in the life of followers of Jesus.

The gift of the evangelical stream to our spiritual journeys, to Waterford, and to the broader church is that it invites us each to hear the call to conversion while also stressing Jesus' missionary mandate to disciple the nations. Throughout it all this stream calls us time and time again to the Living Word of God (Jesus), the written word of God (The Bible), and the proclaimed Word of God.

Snapshots. Like the photo from my trip they each tell a part of the story. They each are needed for the complete picture and perspective. They each are valid and significant and a specific and special lens. Each snapshot of Jesus connects with one of the streams. Each stream is rooted within the life and teaching of Jesus – from incarnation in Matthew chapter one, to evangelical in chapter twenty-eight.

As we conclude this series I wonder which stream have you found that you resonate with? Which stream is the most unlike your current spirituality? Which stream do you find it difficult to value and appreciate?

Perhaps another type of question. Where do you observe here at Waterford or in the world an integration of the streams? Times when people and groups from various streams come together and overlap their snapshots to provide a better glimpse of the kingdom of God?

I sit at the round table and I look around and I see individuals from the six streams – Incarnation, Charismatic, Holiness, Social Justice, Contemplative, Evangelical – and I begin to feel that anxiety of wondering how could we all stay at the table? Will the table of Waterford Mennonite Church or Mennonite Church USA be big enough for us all to fit? Will some be squeezed out or made to feel unworthy or unwelcome or unnecessary? But ah, then I remember. If we follow each of the streams backwards we each, every single one of the streams, ends up at the same beginning point. Jesus Christ. And then my anxiety begins to dissipate as the joy overflows and I begin to praise God for diversity and unique perspectives and the gift, the true gift that God acknowledges that we are all different with different learning styles and preferences and personalities and therefore we rejoice and celebrate that there are also different streams of spirituality. It is my hope that now, when someone or a group of a perceived different stream frustrates you or annoys you, we can respond by saying “I’m thankful for diversity because it further exemplifies what a mighty and big God we serve! That’s not my lens, and yet trying to see this through your lens helps me have a broader and clearer picture of God, myself, and you.”

May we celebrate the streams. May we find space at our table at Waterford for each of the six streams. And may we continue to join our voices in praying that God will do the work of binding us together with cords that cannot be broken.

May it be so.
Amen.

ⁱ Richard B. Gardner, *Matthew: Believers Church Bible Commentary* (Herald Press: Scottsdale, Pennsylvania), 69.

ⁱⁱ Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (Harper San Francisco: San Francisco, California).

ⁱⁱⁱ Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew: Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Brazos Press: Grand Rapids, Michigan), 114.

^{iv} Foster, 51.