*Lord, take the words you have given me and plant them in the hearts of those who are receptive.*

**Three Steps for Our Times**

In the gospels, at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, he tells us how we are to live and how to have a right relationship with God. In the latter part of his ministry as he heads to Jerusalem he warns what not to do as he confronts the Jewish leadership, “Woe to you who….” He shines light onto the dark places and the dark places rise up against him.

He allowed the ugliness of humankind and the Spirit of Evil to come at him. He absorbed all that darkness into himself and allowed it to take his physical, human life. In this way he exposed the evil to the fullest extent.

Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. did the same. They pushed against the darkness not with the same violence as the dark uses, but by shining light onto the darkness, forcing it to expose itself so blatantly that it could no longer sustain its lies. It could no longer appear right.

Jesus showed us that Life and Love are always victorious over the dark, over the evil. He rose again not for vengeance, but to show the love of God, the forgiveness of God, and the victory of Light.

When Jesus stopped being a physical presence on this earth, he sent us an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, to be with us forever. At Pentecost, which is the time of the church year we are now celebrating, Jesus provided us with the first experience of the Holy Spirit, present in us, making us one with Christ. It began when the Apostles were filled with this spirit and spoke out to the people in such a way that each of them heard the Gospel in their own language. This same spirit is present with us and in us, but there are steps or tasks we must accomplish in order to experience the Holy Spirit ourselves.

**First** we must invite the Holy Spirit into us, invite Jesus into our lives. Today’s reading from **Acts says**: “**From one ancestor he made all nations 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 grope for him and find him--though indeed he is not far from each one of us. For in him we live and move and have our being’**….” We are alive in this time in these circumstances for this purpose to grope for God and find him, inviting him intimately into our lives… This is our first task. The reading from **John** tells us: **Jesus said, “… I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you and he will be in you.”** Invite the Holy Spirit in, and the Spirit will be known to you.

Our **second** task is to choose to release the darkness in ourselves: our own greed, self-righteousness, and lust for power. We must give up the demand that we get what we want, how we want, when we want. We must give up the entitled idea that we know what is right rather than looking to God to tell us what is right. We must be willing to surrender our will to God’s will.

By cleaning up our own spirits we make room for God’s Spirit to fill us with light. Today’s reading from John tells us: Jesus said, **“They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.”** If we invite him, if we make room for Him, Christ will show us the way. The Psalm today tells us: **Come and listen, all you who fear God, and I will tell you what he has done for me. I called out to him with my mouth, and his praise was on my tongue. If I had found evil in my heart, the Lord would not have heard me; But in truth God has heard me; he has attended to the voice of my prayer.”**

*If “I” found evil in my heart and was not willing to give it up, the Lord could not have heard me.*

By working to release the dark within us, we make room for the light of the Spirit to fill us. Then we can become conduits of Christ’s Light in the world.

This is our **third** step, to be Christ’s body in the world, bringing in the light and exposing the darkness. We must confront and challenge the darkness. The way we confront and challenge must be with love, light, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, self-control, AND persistence. Do not fight the darkness with anger, hatred, vengeance, and self-righteousness. We must not hate or even judge the politicians, CEOs, or any who abuse their power. Instead, love them, pray for them, and give them to God, THEN stand in the way of their abusive actions with love and stubbornness. Be steady against the tide of their anger, greed, and destructiveness. We must be the light by doing what we know to be right, doing what God calls us individually to do within the life we are now living.

This may be to love our families better, to reconcile with someone with whom we have a conflict. It may be to invite a refugee family into our home, or march in Washington D.C. Or it may be to speak the truth despite the risks. (My story)

The life of **Susan B. Anthony** is a good example of someone who lived her life in this way. She started her life as a shy Quaker girl, who was seen as fragile, melancholy, and insecure. Her upbringing brought her into alignment with **step one** of the spiritual processes. She was open and receptive to the spirit. Being a Quaker prepared her for her work in the world since Quakers believed in the absolute equality between the sexes. However, the world was in a very different place. In the mid 1800s women were the legal property of their husbands. A married woman of the time had no right even to her own children, let alone any property. If a woman inherited something from her father it went immediately into her husband’s name. They certainly had no right to vote. Women lived in complete economic dependence on their husbands or fathers. (Check out the movie “Miss Potter” with Renee Zellweger and Ewan McGregor for an entertaining example of someone else who resisted this.)

At the age of 25 Susan B. Anthony made her decision to fight the injustice. She decided not to marry until “I am crowned with all the rights, privileges, and immunities of a citizen.” Step-by-step she found her way starting with the temperance movement that was already in action. She realized she was going to have to prepare her self more consciously **(our step two)** and so she worked on her public speaking and chose to live very simply.

As she began speaking out she came face-to-face with the men and women of that time who insisted on maintaining the status quo. They found her and her power to be infuriating. The more successful she became the more of their rage she had to face. Newspaper articles about her were scathing and demeaning. They called her a “shrewish maiden”. However, she learned to follow **the third step**. She became famous for standing her ground in such a way that her calm, her sense of humor, and her amazing composure under impossible circumstances gained her the respect of even her enemies.

When asked if she prayed she said, “I pray every single second of my life; not on my knees but with my work…. Work and worship are one with me.”

If you know our history you know that she was instrumental in getting women the right to vote. This simple change was the seed that has grown into as much liberty and independence as women in America have today.

Evelyn Underhill writes in her book, *The Spiritual Life*, **“… the prevalent notion that spirituality and politics have nothing to do with one another is the exact opposite of the truth. Once it is accepted in a realistic sense, the spiritual life has everything to do with politics. It means that certain convictions about God and the world become the moral and spiritual imperatives of our life; and this must be decisive for the way we choose to behave about that bit of the world over which we have been given a limited control.”** (From Part III, The Spiritual Life as Co-operation with God)

First, we invite God into our hearts. Then we work on ourselves, making room for God’s light within us. Then we listen for God’s guidance in how best to take that light out into the world. We are not responsible for the whole world. Like Susan B. Anthony, we are only responsible for the circumstances and times in which we find ourselves. Our response must be one of love, courage, and stubborn persistence for what we know to be right.

I would like to end with a quote from today’s Psalm:

**Bless our God, you peoples;**

**Make the voice of his praise to be heard;**

**Who holds our souls in life,**

**And will not allow our feet to slip.**

**For you, O God, have proved us;**

**You have tried us just as silver is tried.**

**You brought us into the snare;**

**You laid heavy burdens upon our backs.**

**You let enemies ride over our heads;**

**We went through fire and water;**

**But you brought us out into a place of refreshment.**

**Amen**