

“Spirit of Availability”  
A sermon preached by Kim Grant  
John Knox Presbyterian Church  
May 5, 2012

Psalm 67  
Philippians 2:1-13

It is a pleasure and an honor for me to be here, in this spot this morning! For those of you who don't know me, I am the secretary here at John Knox. So this is not my usual place to be. But I DO spend a lot of time in here, and I must say, that it is a bit strange to be in this place with PEOPLE in it. Usually I am the only one here. And I give thanks for you and your vision and sacrifice in making this place a reality.

My favorite spot in this sanctuary is right there (2<sup>nd</sup> step, slightly left of center). This amazing thing happens. In the winter when I get here it is still dark. And when I am in my favorite spot, all the sudden the sun burst forth over the rooftops, and its like God smacks you with a big kiss right on the side of the face. And He says “Good morning Kim! Welcome to this new day I have given you!” Welcome to this new day he has given all of us today!

When I was asked give this morning's message, that night I awoke at 2 in the morning, and this word came to me, “Preach on those pictures hanging on your wall.” These pictures are paintings, expressions of faith by Navajo artist Elmer Yazzi. We met Elmer in the summer of 2000. Our family and the families of several of my college friends for years would gather for a week of service every other summer. That year we chose to volunteer among the Navajo. Elmer was the art teacher at Rehobath Christain School where we stayed that week. He spent a long evening with our group teaching us about the Navajo culture and about his own life. The two pictures that hang on our wall are titled “Train Up a Child”, based on Proverbs 22:6 which states “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” (KJV) and the other is “Spirit of Availability”.

In Train up a Child”, we see a beautiful portrayal of parents and child, and in the circle surrounding them, symbols of their life – a Hogan, the traditional Navajo home, corn, animals, and all that enriches their lives. What are the symbols you might use in expressing your faith in a picture?

Of the two pictures, I am most drawn to “Spirit of Availability”. Elmer said *“This visual reminder was inspired from the words of David Ring, a man who suffered early in life from ridicule because of his speech. While serving on a youth committee in 1990 a member quoted Mr. Ring. He said ‘God does not ask for one’s abilities. All He asks for is or availability.’ “* In the painting we see the glory of God descending from above, and the rainbow representing God's promises. I see someone on a firm foundation who has set themselves apart to be available to God. As Elmer says, *“a living sacrifice”*.

What does it say to us? How do we hear God, and then how do we respond - both individually, and as a church?

Last Sunday I heard 14 year old Benjamin Deloveria preach , and he said “you have to make space for blessing”. Do we make space, time away from the business and clutter of our lives to hear that “still small voice”, that leads to blessing? To pay attention to that nagging on our heart, or to that Bible verse that touches us in a special way and calls us to action. To have that “Spirit of Availability”? I think that's a part of what our Sabbath Journey these next few months is about. So where are WE? Are we attuned to the calling of God? Do we make SPACE for that to happen? And then, how do we respond?

In this morning's scripture, we have the example of Christ. Philippians 2:5-8 says *"Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross."*

In the Old Testament we have the example of Isaiah. Isaiah 6:8 says, *"Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I. Send me!'"*

We have Mary, mother of Jesus, who was told she would give birth to God's son. And she said: (Luke 1:38) *"I am the Lord's servant," ... "May it be to me as you have said."*

Then there are those who refused, but God had his way in the end. And Jonah comes to mind! In Jonah 1:1-3 we read *"The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me.' But Jonah ran away from the LORD and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the LORD."*

We know Jonah's voyage did not go as planned. Because of Jonah, God caused a great storm, and in order to save the lives of the others he was thrown overboard, and was swallowed by a whale. While spending 3 days in the whale, Jonah had a change of heart. He eventually was "burped and beached". Then God gave Jonah a second chance. Scripture says, *"Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.' Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh."* (Jonah 3:1-3)

Those who complained or made excuses:

In Exodus, chapters 3 & 4 God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, and said *"I will send you to pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt."* (Exodus 3:10)

Moses kept saying "but what if.... but they won't ....but I'm not ..... " but, but , but.

but God said "I am" and gave Moses all he needed to do what God asked.

I need to confess that I am often like a MOSES. I want to tell you a story. My story. Two years ago, God put something on my heart. And when it didn't go away, I began talking with my family about it, because ultimately it involved all of them. They all immediately said "what's the problem? Yes, of course, we are OK with this" Then I began focusing on all my own inadequacies and reasons why I could not do this thing. I was reacting like Moses did, saying but, but, but...." But God, in one of those special moments, spoke to me and said "Why are you afraid to let me bless you?" And indeed, in his time and in a way no one could have imagined, this blessing came to pass.

Why are you afraid to let me BLESS YOU? You see, when we yield ourselves to God, he blesses us!

Our daughter Michelle heard there was need for people to serve at a school in San Pedro, Belize. She was "available" and signed up to go. The only thing was the expense. She didn't have the money to go. But her morning devotions one day said "use what you are passionate about to serve God." Michelle thought, I am passionate about baking bread. So she took orders for fresh baked bread, and when the sale was finished she had more than enough to cover her expenses. In fact, she had enough to almost cover the expense for a second person. God had blessed her!

As a Church, collectively, JKPC embodies the “spirit of availability”. Our tag- line, OPEN-CARING-COMMUNITY, says it all.

A couple weeks ago Lisa shared about a tutoring student who had never been told the bible stories, or about Jesus. Because JKPC opens its doors and dedicated people who care, give their time to help students learn and be successful in school, kids are learning about our God, and the love of Jesus.

In a Spirit of Availability, John Knox is willing to try new things. We have the opportunity to apply for a youth grant through the Center for Congregations. The youth, in thinking about how they might use a grant, want to open the building REGULARLY, and invite neighborhood teens in. John Knox church has a chance to “train up a child” and hopefully many children, in the way they should go. To be “available” for God to work in and through us for the sake of our neighborhood teens. What an opportunity! We pray for God’s guidance through this application process.

As Secretary, I sit in this unique place where I am often the first person people who come to the church encounter during the week. It is such a blessing to be the one who sits in that spot!

Just this past week, a neighbor man came into the office. He has a passion for the game of soccer, and though his health doesn’t allow him to play competitively any more, he wants to coach kids. He lives in International Village, and had distributed flyers there about a soccer camp he was offering. But he got no responses. So he went to the administrative office to talk about the lack of response, but nobody was there. He said he then had the urge to go to that church down the street where he has seen people playing soccer. He believes the Spirit of God led him here. He happens to be originally from Sierra Leone, West Africa, and played on his country’s national team years ago. Back in 1986 Bill and I were with a mission team in Sierra Leone for a month. So I was able to speak the only 2 phrases of a tribal dialect I remember to him! He is willing to work with us on our soccer camp coming up in June, and perhaps continue on after that camp week. We will see what develops! What a blessing!

YOUR spirit of availability, in offering space for the Neighborhood Christian Legal Clinic, has created unique opportunities. A couple weeks ago, I was talking with one of the clients of the legal clinic. While waiting for the attorney, she had lots of time, so I showed her all around the church. Then we went into the sanctuary. This person is from the Mideast, and of another faith, and it may have been her first time in a Christian sanctuary. She took in the beautiful stained glass windows Tim made, the instruments, the pipe organ, and the cross. The altar table was still down on the floor for communion, and the paten and chalice were still out. She was drawn to them. We were able to talk about Jesus, and the last supper, and the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord. It was a wonderful conversation! Such a blessing!

In a few minutes we will celebrate communion. Let us give thanks that HIS table is open to all who would come.

Thanks be to God, that he is at work in our lives, and here at John Knox. Let us continue to practice the “spirit of availability”, knowing God will equip us and bless us to work for his glory.

Amen