I’d like to share a little about Bible School as well today. But I’m not going to address the themes or any of the teachings at least directly. I would like to address something I think is quite a bit more important than what is taught at Bible School. And that is, I think, the spirit of Bible school. The presence of God at Bible school. Because ultimately there is no substitute for God, or an encounter with Jesus.

One thing I think that is vital to understand about faith, is that our teachings about God, or doctrines are always inadequate and flawed to some degree. What we teach about God is always imperfect. Martin Luther’s catachsim wasn’t perfect. The Bible isn’t perfect. My sermon isn’t perfect. And I’m sure that each person who taught a station at Bible School this week realized full well that each session was far from perfect. Yet as our Gospel lesson says today, the seed grows even though the farmer knows not how. God’s Spirit always seems to be at work at Bible School.

That’s why there is something more important to address when it comes to church life in general. More important than what we teach or what we believe or what we know is how we are coming into the presence of God. Experiencing God. Listening to God. Hearing God speak to us.

It’s not all or nothing it’s not that it doesn’t matter what is taught. But that’s not the most important thing. What we really want is God. The presence of Jesus. And so I would like to address the Spirit of God or the presence of Jesus as I think it is coming to be realized at Bible School here at St. Paul. We can teach and do our activities. But the Spirit teaches as well, I think I’m learning a little. Little by little, the seed grows even though the farmer knows not how. It’s something small that becomes a large shelter. You can’t see it. You can’t tell by looking. It is faith and not sight. It’s not really what is taught, it’s like the spirit in which it is taught.

Jesus expressed his presence in what he called the kingdom of God. It’s in our Gospel lesson today. But as he taught about it, he never gave a definitive answer as to what the kingdom of God was. He always said, to my knowledge, that the kingdom of God was like. Isn’t that interesting? Today we have two examples of what God’s presence or God’s Spirit, or the presence of Jesus is like. You can’t it put on a test with a correct answer. Yeah, there is no definitive answer. It’s always, well it’s kind of like this. It’s kind of like that.

This Gospel lesson that we have today, has saved many a pastor from despair. And I think it would save a lot of people in the church today who are worried about the church. As a pastor you often think that the success or failure of the church is all about how you function. How good your sermons are. What a great guy you are. You need to liked. The whole pastor thing can very quickly become a popularity contest. This is what Paul is talking about in the 2nd lesson today when he speaks to people who judge by appearances, and a great performance. It can all land on your shoulders and there are many people in the church who are more than willing to believe that as well.

But some of you farm. Imagine what it would be like if the seed, in order to grow had to totally depend on you. You have things to do. Water and fertilize, spray, you help it grow. But you can’t force it to grow. Make it germinate. You aren’t responsible for the mystery of life. It sprouts and grows and does most of the work by a force that you do not understand, my guess is even with all the genetics. The earth produces of itself. You can’t make your child grow physically, you can feed him, but most of work of growth is done by a force you don’t understand. This is the foundation of the church. The spirit will do what the spirit will do. We have our Bible school and we teach and do what we can do. But in the end the real heavy lifting here is not up to us. In the end, the Spirit teaches. This is not about passivity, or laziness, there is much to do. But so often we think that what will happen all depends on us and how well we perform. Our Gospel lesson today begins by freeing us from that. The real heavy lifting here is done by God, not us. And anyone interested in a church that grows would do well to learn this well.

It’s a radical message to a world that believes for example that “if it is to be, it is up to me”. Certain things are like that I suppose. If you never planted the seed, it wouldn’t grow. In that sense it’s true. But as an ideology that says that this is how life works it fails miserably, as all ideology does. What you make of yourself comes from a lot of help in a way that you might never understand. God here is like power steering. Remember old cars without it, or those old grain trucks? Soon power steering came along or electric steering. Sure, the wheel won’t turn without your input. But it’s not all up to you. As the kids screamed many times this week, “trust Jesus!”.

And I just want to say today that I think that we’re learning about this in Bible School here at St. Paul. Something is happening by a force and a power that we do not understand. I think it’s the Holy Spirit. It’s not about numbers, or what it looks like. It’s not about what’s in the book. That’s walking by sight and not faith. No, it’s something much different from that, something that never gets taught by us at all. I don’t teach about it much. But it’s something that’s happening, almost inspite of us. I think it began to grow a long time ago in Bible School and continues to grow in our midst. Yeah, if we didn’t do what we could do, it wouldn’t happen I suppose, but it’s something where we are getting far more out of it, than what we put into it. And that’s one way of talking about something that we and our children can learn about.

The word that the Bible uses for what I’m talking about is the word holiness. Now I don’t know what you think of when you think of the word holiness. Often it brings to mind for many people something like “holier than thou”. Holy people are people who read the bible all the time or talk about God all the time, and don’t seem to have the problems that other people have. Holiness means something like “don’t run”, “Shhh your in church”.

Well, if that’s what your understanding of what holiness is, saying that our Bible School is growing in Holiness by the power of the Holy Spirit’s work of growth probably won’t make any sense. For the most part Bible School is not very quiet in God’s presence, it’s more like organized chaos. These kids have a lot of energy and there’s a lot going on. It’s pretty high energy. And we change up things sometimes things on the fly and run out of time. And Amazon didn’t come through with some of the chemicals that I needed. And sometimes the station leaders get frustrated and all the rest.

But the Spirit is working doing some heavy lifting for us. And I think it’s in realm of holiness. Holiness as I understand it, is primarily about being at ease. To be natural. Something is happening at Bible School year by year. It’s just becoming more and more natural. It’s a place where it’s just so easy to be yourself. I don’t feel like I have to put on a great performance or be profound, or even do the skit right. It just comes naturally. You don’t have to fight it, or make it any more or less than it is. There is some pressure, but you just do what you can do, and somehow, by some miracle, it seems to be enough. You walk into the building and you are just totally at ease. And if you blow it, it’s OK, it worked anyway. I don’t know how to to describe it, I can only say, it’s like. It’s like being at ease. I came into Bible school, feeling like I had to do it just right, and a bit overwhelmed by all the details. And by the end, I didn’t need to take myself so seriously. People really care about these kids. But it’s natural. If you watch some athletics play ball, they just make it seem so easy. It’s not easy, but it’s like you letting go and letting God in some way. And it works. Somehow the Holy Spirit is at work. And in a world that where so often, it seems like there is no other strength than our own, what a relief to discover that this is not true.

The Gospel message is that the foundation of life is Grace and love. God helping us do what we cannot do on our own. It seems to be growing and flourishing at vacation Bible School here at St. Paul. And the more it happens the less you have to worry about getting it just right. How it happens no one really knows. But I think it’s growing. Holiness. The church is the one place you can come to and really learn how to be yourself with other people. It’s wild and crazy, out of control. But the Holy Spirit does the heavy lifting. Amen.