

Pastor Mollie's Sermon
June 9, 2019
Pentecost: John 20:19-23

We have all wrestled with those tough questions at some point in our life...
Why didn't God heal my friend? My mom? My child?
Where was God when I was battling through that storm?
If God loves me so much, why did I get hurt?
Maybe it was years ago, or maybe these are current thoughts in your head today?
These are questions I have wrestled with
Always trying to view God or Jesus as my friend, healer, comforter, or the subject of blame...
But growing up, rarely did I ever use the language of Holy Spirit.
It wasn't until seminary,
I was told my paperwork included a lot of God and Jesus language but where was the Holy Spirit?
Hmmm... where WAS the Holy Spirit?
Ever since that interview, I have now become more aware of the presence and language of the Holy Spirit.
Well today is Pentecost, a day just for celebrating the Holy Spirit
To hear all about how the Holy Spirit was made known with Fire, and doves, and through the breath of Jesus!
Yet, it was not a one-time occurrence back in the book of Acts...
The Holy Spirit is very much working, and living and breathing through each of us!
And you may all be scratching your heads and asking....
Yeah, ok, but HOW? Where IS the Holy Spirit?
Good question!
Barbara Brown Taylor said once in one of her lectures
"The Holy Spirit is something we trust, not something we understand."
We trust the Holy Spirit to stir us to prophesy when we witness injustice.
We trust in and celebrate the many and varied ways the Spirit works in our lives, especially the ways in which she manages to know just what we need individually and communally and when.
To trust that the Holy Spirit *will indeed act*.
Perhaps *how* the Spirit acts, is not as much what needs to be heard as that the Spirit *will act* -- and in ways that will affirm, surprise, even upend our faith in Jesus' ministry both then and now.
And let's be honest as Taylor says later in her lecture, *"We don't keep the Spirit of life in the back room because she is shy but because she is dangerous,"*
Isn't that the truth?
We tend only to believe in the Spirit's activity in our lives if it is comfortable and convenient; if it affirms what we want to hear, not what we need to hear;
if it allows a reasonable getaway plan.
Hence our frustration when we wrestle with those "where is God" moments in our lives!
Have you ever noticed, in our reading for today, that the arrival of the Holy Spirit doesn't remove the disciples from challenges and hardships,
but rather equips them to persevere, even flourish, amid them?

For instance, the disciples are hiding in the upper room out of fear that those who crucified Jesus may come after them.

And what does Jesus do as he breathes the Holy Spirit upon them?

He doesn't take them away from Jerusalem or fortify the room in which they're hiding, but instead he sends them out into that chaotic world: "As the Father sent me, so I now send you" (20:21),

and then he gives them the gift of the Holy Spirit to create in them the courage they will need to follow Jesus' command.

Similarly, in Acts, the disciples are waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit and, once it comes,

they go out to proclaim the good news to people they had good reason to believe would be at least skeptical if not outright hostile to their message.

Again in Paul, the Spirit is given to enable individual believers to look beyond their individual needs, hopes, or fears and equip them with distinct gifts,

all in order to work together for the "common good" (1 Cor. 12:7).

Throughout these passages, we get the sense that the Spirit isn't some kind of superhero sent to rescue us,

but rather the one who equips, encourages, and stays with us, helping us perceive the needs of our neighbors and community and THEN

rise to the occasion to meet those needs with equal measures of persistence, competence, and courage.

In John's Gospel, after all, the Spirit is described as *parakletos*, the one who "comes alongside" us,

the one who advocates for us, remains with us, strengthens and helps us.

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All well in good, of course, but perhaps it's helpful to admit that this may stand in contrast to what we expect or, maybe deep down, hope the Spirit will do.

That is, I think we often hope that the Spirit will just plain save us,

or at least to take us away from whatever challenges seems to threaten to overwhelm us in the moment.

But the Spirit seems to be more about *with* rather than *from* – as in being *with* us during challenges rather than taking those challenges away *from* us.

So although we may all recognize that while we may often hope that God will remove us from challenging or difficult situations,

God often instead comes alongside of us in the presence of the Holy Spirit in order to strengthen and equip us to endure, and even to flourish, amid these challenges and difficulties.

Why? Perhaps because God may actually be working through us for the common good, to care for the need of our neighbors, community, and world.

We have a purpose: to care for those around us as God cares for us, to make wherever we may find ourselves a better place,

to share God's love in word and deed that others may know they are not alone and, indeed, are loved.

We are here, not simply for ourselves but for those around us.

I'll confess, one of my greatest hopes for the St. Mark, along with every church community, is a call to move beyond individual concerns to be able to see ourselves as part of larger community.

It is not about protecting what I have or you have,
but rather that you and I and so many others are called together to be that outward facing
community.

We are, after all, the Body of Christ, those authorized and equipped to care for this world God
loves so much.

And it is the Spirit who reminds us of this role and enables us to fulfill it.

This may not always be all that we want, but perhaps it is just what those around us need.

The Promise of Pentecost is not that we will suffer no more difficulty or hardships,
nor that God will remove us from challenges,

but rather that in the Holy Spirit, God comes to be with us and for us and to use all that we have
and are for the sake of those around us. AMEN.