

Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Romans 8:22-27

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

The Holy Spirit!! We've all heard of it. Some of us have experienced it. We believe there's a purpose for it. But what is it exactly? We first heard about the Holy Spirit when it hovered in the form of a dove above Jesus' head when he came up out of the Jordan River after his baptism. It filled him with strength and courage and the power to spend the next forty days wrestling with Satan in the wilderness before he began his ministry. We don't hear about it again until Jesus begins his Farewell Discourse to his disciples preparing them for his departure from earth. So what is it exactly? Is it the power of God? Is it the presence of Jesus without bodily form? Jesus describes it as an Advocate for the disciples...a companion for them as they begin their ministry. It's apparently a force to be reckoned with because when it arrives it does so with a wind that rattles windows and shakes walls and terrifies those huddled in the upper room in Jerusalem. And it leaves a tongue of fire over the head of each one of them. And it has such power that it ejects the disciples into the streets of Jerusalem to speak foreign languages they had never heard to people they had never met telling them about the Good News of Jesus Christ. They didn't have time to protest and say things like, "Oh, no, I can't do THAT!!" Before they had time to think or protest, they were out in the streets talking to devout Jews who were from many nations and had come to Jerusalem for Passover. They weren't speaking to other believers in Jesus. They were speaking to people *outside* the Jesus Movement of their time. And they were speaking to people from all corners of the known world who would then take this story and this experience and this message about Jesus back home with them and the disciples would, indeed, have spread the word of Jesus as Messiah to all the known world. Perhaps one hallmark of the Holy Spirit is that it empowers us to connect with others. But such spectacular things just don't happen any more. Or do they?

We tend to think of spectacular Biblical events as just that...spectacular Biblical events...that do not happen to real people in real time in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But are we sure about that? The Advocate, as Jesus calls it, is the Spirit of Truth. "The Advocate," Jesus says, "will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me," Jesus tells them, "because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." [John 16:13-15] The Advocate, then, the Spirit of Truth, speaks God's words through Jesus to the Holy Spirit who then speaks to us. Sometimes we refer to it as that 'still, small voice' within us. Well, how do we know that the Holy Spirit is speaking to us? We have all kinds of conversations going on inside our heads at any given time and many of those conversations are not *from* God or *about* God. Some of them are simply our own willfulness or the words of the devil trying to talk us into rationalizing something that we know darn good and well is false. We may not want to hear the Truth from the one who speaks it, but if we're honest with ourselves, we usually know when we're hearing the Truth. Listening to that Truth...that word from the Holy Spirit...is transformative. It tells us the truth when we would rather believe something else. It challenges us to halt. To Think. To re-think. To hold out the possibility of changing our minds. To be honest with ourselves. To be open to a new perspective because we have new information. All of us know when we're lying to ourselves because it is a line of thinking and a voice that is self-serving and rationalizing. When we hear ourselves saying in our own thoughts about something we said or did that didn't feel quite right to us at the time...and the thought is, "Well, I had a perfect RIGHT to do that or say that." If we find ourselves full of righteous indignation, that's most likely NOT the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, if the thought comes to us that perhaps our words were too strident or too harsh or unnecessarily hurtful to someone else, that may very well be a little nudge from the Holy Spirit that an apology of some kind is in order. Maybe some relational repair work needs to be done.

Our own feelings and thoughts are cascading on a regular basis and sometimes it's very hard to sort out what is "me" from what is an evil influence and what is the Holy Spirit. Maybe our conscience is our avenue to the Holy Spirit. Most of us know what's right and what's wrong. Most of us have a pretty good idea how Jesus would want us to conduct ourselves in any given situation. Perhaps that little nudge that we get from our conscience is a little whisper from the Holy Spirit to reconsider some way of thinking or some action we're contemplating taking.

Just as the Holy Spirit empowered Jesus to begin his ministry immediately after his baptism, so the Holy Spirit empowers his disciples to begin their ministry within days of Jesus' departure from them. They begin their ministries without thinking about it. They are simply compelled to reach out to others. What prevents us from doing likewise? Are we overthinking things? Is fear standing in our way? Jesus says to us repeatedly, "Do not be afraid." When we pause and listen to that still, small voice within us, we can almost always hear it.

But there is a flipside to how we experience the Holy Spirit as well. Sometimes, it's not that we are struggling to summon the courage to take a particular action on behalf of our faith; sometimes it's a sense of feeling compelled to take such an action. The feeling is so strong that we sense that we don't have any choice. We simply *must* do what's set before us. When I was struggling with answering my call to the priesthood, which I had put off for a paltry 50 years, I had an interesting conversation with Bishop Shannon. I told him that he could turn me down in terms of going to seminary...and I told him that there was a part of me that was hoping that he would do just that...but I could not 'quit'...I simply could not NOT pursue this. I felt compelled. The rest, as they say, is history.

What is the still small voice that is whispering in *your* ear saying to you? Is it something you feel drawn to? Is it something you know you are supposed to do but you can think of a thousand reasons why you won't do it? What are your conversations with that still, small voice within you that keeps nagging at you? I'll tell you one thing: the Holy Spirit is persistent as all get out!! So get ready for a wrestling match!

And the Holy Spirit is transformative. It tells the truth when we want to believe something else. Working in concert with the Holy Spirit changes us. It's like having a rudder in the water and the current and the wind and the person steering the boat all have a hand in where the boat goes...and sometimes how fast it goes, but none do it alone: not you with your hand on the wheel, not the rudder in the water, not the wind in the sails, not the current, and not the Holy Spirit alone. Whatever gets done is all done in concert.

For us, the sin of not believing in Jesus is not the lack of faith but rather, the sin of splitting belief and practice into word and action or walk and talk. Our sin comes into play when we are set on beliefs but our beliefs do not mean change of mind or heart, or actions of justice, going after those suffering, and restituting what we have destroyed on earth; then our sin continues, ravenously alive behind our comfortable beliefs. Oh yes, we believe that humanity is destroying the planet, but we aren't going to do anything about it. It's just a belief and that belief has not stirred us to action.

Sin occurs when we turn a blind eye to social justice as if it were none of our business as Christians...social justice and equity are the heart and soul of the gospel of Jesus Christ. You can't believe in the one without working diligently for the other. Are we "armchair Christians" or are we "roll up our sleeves and get sweaty Christians?"

In all likelihood, as much as we believe that the walls of this sanctuary are coated in the Holy Spirit, we are pretty sure that that Spirit is not going to fly into this space and hover over our heads. And it's pretty safe to say that a mighty wind is not going to come charging through those front doors and make the chandeliers sway. And we are almost certain that the windows won't rattle and there will not be a tongue of fire over each of our heads. Not this time. And not in this place. Does that mean that the Holy Spirit is not showing up for us? Hardly. All we need to do is catch ourselves squirming a bit in our seats as we think about all the things that we're pretty sure God is calling us to do that we, in fact, are not doing. The Holy Spirit is here, all right. It's that little nagging stirring inside of each of us

that is prompting us to rethink our priorities, to delve deeper into our prayer life, to converse more in prayer with God and with Jesus and is almost shoving us out the door of this place to go into the world...just outside this building...and spread the Good News of Jesus Christ...in action as well as word.

The Holy Spirit is just as potent and powerful this morning as it was on that early morning in Jerusalem when the wind rattled the windows, a flame of fire rested over each head and everyone in that room was propelled out into the world speaking languages they had never even heard before...let alone spoken.

Never underestimate the power of the Spirit. If you let it, it will change your mind, it will change your heart and it will change your life.

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.