

Pentecost
St. John 14:8-17
June 9th, 2019
St. George's Bolton
Fr. Chris

A Spiritual Presence

“Jesus answered: ‘Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?”

A few weeks ago I spoke about how God is one God, and I offered this quote as evidence that when Jesus walked the earth, this was not a separate being who had come among us, not someone whom God adopted because of His goodness and holiness, but rather this is God walking among us in the person of Jesus the Christ. This is God with us, in person, literally translated: Emanuel. You cannot get more personal than this: that God abides with us.

Now God will abide with each of us, not in the next house over, not taking up residence in your guest room if you have one, not bunking with you in your room. This God will abide with you. You will abide in God, and God will abide in you.

We have a religious practice to remind us of this presence, God in us, and we in God. For centuries Christians have gathered to observe, and witness this moment. It is meant to give us a brief glimpse of the Holy One in each of us. And how can you be any closer to God than to consume a piece of God’s earthly flesh and drink some of God’s blood, which was shed for each of us so long ago. You become what you eat. You are what you eat.

Sometimes what we eat is forgotten quickly. It brings us a momentary pleasure, and once it disappears in our stomachs, we will soon forget about it, unless in some way it was extraordinary. Sometimes if it was hot and spicy, we will also be reminded of its presence inside of us, waiting for the burning discomfort to pass. Maybe we even pop a Zantac to relieve the discomfort if it won’t go away.

You are what you eat. Imagine what you become and who you are if you eat God. God is in you, and you are in God. You are nourished in the Spirit of God, whom Jesus said that he would send to us, and this spiritual nourishment feeds us and makes us stronger in our faith and empowers us to live as God would have us live: that we would observe and do the commandment Jesus gave us for how to live. And what was that commandment? That we love one another as God loves us. Simply stated here in just several words, yet a lifetime of effort to implement.

Each time we gather here, God extends to us the golden opportunity to share in God's Spirit. Each time we gather here, there is a brief moment as we kneel at this humble altar rail and become so close, so intimate with God, that our hearts should be moved with and by God's love. This moment is a transformative moment. It is intimate because you cannot get any closer than this, that God is in you and you are in God and the Spirit is refreshed that dwells within you since your Baptism. The word communion reflects this intimacy as we break down the Latin roots of the word, quite literally, "union with."

As a young boy growing up in the Episcopal Church, I remember watching people returning from communion as they passed by my pew, and as I looked up at them, this little boy, I remember seeing many of them tearing up, certainly deeply effected by their experience in making communion with God. Whether receiving communion causes us to feel sad, joyous, or moves us to tears as we realize the love God has shown to us, it can be a powerful experience.

And then sometimes we don't experience anything other than a tasteless wafer dissolving on our tongue or the sensation of some wine along with it. But that doesn't mean that nothing is happening. We are still receiving spiritual sustenance for that tiny spark of the Spirit that dwells within us. And as long as that spark is glowing all our days, it is a light to guide us through this life. It will cast light on our path when we become lost and anxious. That tiny glowing spark is enough to overcome the darkness that may confront us from time to time.

But the Spirit of God is not limited to one experience of communion. There are many. There is communion going on when we share the peace, which originally came at the time people made their communion with the consecrated bread and wine, but the Peace was soon moved to where it is in the Eucharist as the camaraderie was distracting to some at the most

holy moment of receiving communion with God. It was originally called the “Kiss of Peace” and quite literally, that was how it was exchanged, after the European kiss of greeting on the cheek, in a very solemn fashion.

The Spirit can also be felt in singing. Music and song have inspired and lifted up Christians for centuries as the Holy Spirit moves amongst them during worship. Worshipful music can make the hair on the back of your neck stand up and tingle. Music can move you to great joy and inspire you to go forth in your new life. Music can bring you to tears. Music is very powerful, especially when it is written deep in your memory and you hear a tune or a song or a hymn and it takes you right back to a past moment. (That’s why we love oldies radio replaying the hits from our youth...) Consider how Christmas Carols affect us, for example, or the triumphant march of the Resurrection, “Jesus Christ is Risen Today.”

The Spirit can also be experienced in silence and quiet. The Psalm reminds us, “For God alone my soul in silence waits.” [Psalm 62] The still small voice of God emerges from the silence to speak truth to us.

The Spirit can also be experienced in words. Sometimes the words of scripture move us. Sometimes in a poem the Spirit will move us, and then a musician sets the lyrics to a tune and you have a hymn to remember the words by. Sometimes by an Aphorism, a pithy and wise observation left as a gift for us to unpack, and peel open and revisit, appreciating it like a diamond with many facets, or just as a repeated mantra to remind us of a truth. Sometimes a prayer will touch our minds and open them to new truths. And by the grace of God alone, sometimes the words of a sermon will also do this. I know that God gives me these words to speak, as they are revealed as I type them on the page. It would be very presumptuous and pretentious of me to claim them as my own responsibility alone.

The Gospel this morning describes the Spirit in this way:

“If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to help you and be with you forever— this is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, because he abides with you and will be in you.”

The Spirit of God is described as both an Advocate for us, and as the Spirit of Truth. God is our best advocate and defender when we need one. God will advocate for our inner worth when we feel we have none. This is driven

home to us by love. God is truth and God speaks truth to our souls. The Word of God, the Truth of God always rings true at a deep level. In an age when the truth is no longer something to be taken for granted and when it is difficult to discern, the Truth of God will reveal our way through the morass of falsehoods of this world, to the light at the end of the tunnel which brings us hope. AMEN