

Pentecost Sunday June 5 2022

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:14-17

What is this Holy Spirit that we celebrate today?

What do you know about the Holy Spirit?

As many of you know, I like to clearly define things. I also take seriously that scripture is the rule and norm of our faith, so that is where I will start.

Jesus, in the Gospel of John and the Gospel of Luke talks about the Holy Spirit that will come to the apostles after Jesus has gone. Earlier in Acts, at his ascension, Jesus says that when the Holy Spirit comes the apostles will receive “power”, the Greek word is dynamis from which we get the word dynamo. This power will lead them to be his witnesses from their hometown to the ends of the earth.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus talks about the Holy Spirit as an Advocate/Helper, who will come and give them the words they need to speak the Truth of Jesus. That’s kind of the extent of Jesus’ speaking about the Holy Spirit.

The place we find most information about the Holy Spirit is right here in Acts. Almost half of the references to the Holy Spirit (42) occur in the Acts of the Apostles’ such that one author said you might call it the Acts of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit, because of this text, is represented by fire. What does fire do? It consumes, it changes things- wood to smoke and ash. Raw meat to a juicy steak. It transforms. What does it mean when we use it metaphorically? When we say we’re on fire for something? It means passionate, excited, all in!

The Holy Spirit is also associated with a dove. Why? Because at the baptism of Jesus the Holy Spirit descends from the heavens like a dove and settles upon Jesus. The experience of the church from the beginning until now is that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon a person is (although not exclusively) connected to their baptism. It is why, when I mark the infant before me with the sign of the cross I say, “You have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever.”

The Holy Spirit is also associated with wind. The word for Spirit in Greek is *pneuma*. It’s where we get the word *pneumatic* from. Like the wind, the Spirit is not something you see, but you can see the effects of it. We felt that reality just this past weekend and back in 2020 with the Derecho. The wind, though unseen, is powerful. It moves things, solid and seemingly invincible things. It cleans out the leaves from my back yard (and puts them in my neighbor’s yard!). It brings beauty in a field of wheat waving gently, it cools the skin on a hot day. It fills the sails of a ship and moves them across the world.

What do we learn about the Holy Spirit from Acts? Starting with this reading today? We learn that it is a gift given, laid on us, poured out over us. The imagery always makes me think of a coat that wraps us. Vance Neunemaker on Wednesday talked about that kind of imagery in relationship to the signing of the cross on himself.

That imagery also makes me think of liquid. That coats, moves into and fills. Fills people so they will speak and proclaim the Word. Fills people with faith. Fills them with gifts and talents. It falls on people who hear or read that gospel, it brings faith and joy.

The Apostle Paul talks about the fruits that the Spirit produces in believers: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. All these are said to spring from the presence of the Holy Spirit in us.

It allows for and drives us to communicate with the whole world. To speak the language of people so different from ours, like the apostles did that day. Maybe not quite like an instant Rosetta Stone, like the story presents it, but perhaps more like an ability/desire to communicate that makes it possible.

The Holy Spirit gives courage and speech that can transform lives. Peter and the apostles were still in Jerusalem, still threatened by the Jewish authorities. Yet, empowered by the Holy Spirit, Peter has the courage to proclaim the Good News of God in Jesus Christ and through the power of that proclamation we know that 3,000 were baptized and added to the fellowship of believers that day.

Our Psalm reading says that the Holy Spirit is active in the recreation/renewal of the world. The Spirit is active in the regeneration that occurs every year. In the creation of new things- including us through the waters of Baptism.

In Acts, the Spirit is the fire, wind, inspiration, power that moves believers so that they might Go! Do! Be! Follow! It empowers and moves us to connect with one another. To go up to someone and ask how we can help. To go to the grieving friend and sit with them. To approach the Ethiopian Eunuch and ask if they understand what they are reading in scripture. The Holy Spirit enables and powers all of that.

The Holy Spirit is the means by which things happen in believers and the church. It is the power, by which we can be who we are baptized and called to be- those

who follow after Jesus, doing the works that he did, loving each other and the world in the self-sacrificial way Jesus did.

The Holy Spirit is a gift given to individual believers and the community of those believers that is the church, but a gift that is not for them, but for the world. It orients us to the world.

The Holy Spirit is the ongoing force of faith in the believer. The active movement of God within us. Our piety (as Christians who happen to be Lutheran), our understanding of humanity, says that we cannot by our own understanding or effort fulfill what God requires of us. Even to follow the simplest of God's commands. But, through the power of the Holy Spirit, gifted to us by God through Jesus Christ, we can begin to do what we are called to do. Love God with all our being and love our neighbor in the same way Jesus loved us. The Holy Spirit is what enables us to do those things which might seem impossible to us.

The Holy Spirit renews believers in the image of God. When we daily dip again into those promises of baptism, the baptismal waters. We are washed clean, a breath of new life blows through us and takes away all the Old Adam, Old Eve. It renews us- just like spring renews the earth. The Holy Spirit gives us the power and the motivation to do good works. It leads us to concrete actions towards our neighbors that exemplify what the reign of God looks like. The Holy Spirit moves us to care for and actively engage in the preservation and furtherance of others' wellbeing.

It fires us up for Jesus!

What does that look like? What does that feel like?

For me, the movement of the Spirit is something that feels like a physical tug from my chest. Pulling me towards something. Or the impulse that comes upon me to check in with this person. A thought that springs into my head.

It is what leads me to put this thing into a sermon and someone says- I needed to hear that. It's what gives me the right words in the right moment and the courage to say them.

How do I know what is of the Spirit and what is me? Generally, if I'm attentive to scripture and to our faith. If I speak in congruence with that, the Spirit works. It's when I step outside that framework, try and do my own thing, that things generally go awry.

As Paul reminds us in Romans- the Spirit is not a Spirit of fear. Rather, it is one that frees us. It unbinds. It blows where it wills. It empowers, but it is not violent. It is unpredictable, but not chaotic. The Spirit works quickly, but also over time. I have had many friends who have told stories of having a call to ministry that they ignored for decades, if not longer.

The Holy Spirit is all of those things, and more, but also, it is yours. Poured upon you in your baptism. Blowing through you as you sing the hymns, hear scripture, in the mutual conversation you have with your fellow believers.

It fills this place and blows out all that is stale and stagnant. It refreshes and renews us. It give us, as the followers of Jesus who make up St. John, new energy to go. To go into this world that God so loves and proclaim all that God in Jesus has done for us. To boldly live out our faith in both what we say and what we do.

So, what is the Holy Spirit tugging you to go do? How is the Holy Spirit moving you to love your neighbor? What is the Holy Spirit calling you to say to someone? What word of love, support, care, or caution? What word of truth?

What fruit of the Holy Spirit do you need to cultivate? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

May these questions stir the Spirit within you. May it fill you to overflowing with love for the God who has given everything so that you might have life and love for all those human beings around us. May it renew and revive the church on earth to look more like the reign of God.

Come Holy Spirit, come.