

June 3, 2012

INTRODUCING THE HOLY SPIRIT – Living by the Spirit by Rev. Seth Jones

John 14:25-31; Galatians 5:13-25

Since it is Pentecost, it seems appropriate to spend some time with the Holy Spirit. As I mentioned last week, I have had several people ask me “*What is the Holy Spirit?*” As with so many things, part of the answer is in how we ask the question. The “what” question is really a “who” question. We will learn much about the Holy Spirit if we approach the topic with the understanding that the Holy Spirit is really a person. The person of the Holy Spirit is one of the three persons of the whole of God, an aspect of the Trinity. When I say 'person' here, I do not mean person in the sense of having a body and acting according to an individual will. What I do mean by 'person' as it relates to the Holy Spirit is that the Spirit is an expression of the will of God in a way that is somehow autonomous and yet in direct relationship with the other 'persons' of the Godhead. The Holy Spirit is a 'person' only in how we access and relate to God. God is not a 'person' in the usual sense because, finally, God is, as Paul Tillich says, *the ground of all being*.

We say some pretty amazing things about the Holy Spirit as Christians. The Apostles' Creed is a good historic example of some of the things we say: *I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy universal church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting*. When we say this, it is more appropriate to say, “*I believe in the Holy Spirit **who is responsible for ...***”

Beyond what we say, the Holy Spirit is active throughout Scripture and is the mysterious aspect of the ways of God. Right from the very beginning in Genesis 1:2 says, “*And the Spirit of God hovered above the waters.*” The Spirit is present right at the beginning of Creation itself.

Throughout the summer we will be exploring these mysterious aspects of the Holy Spirit and the person of the Holy Spirit.

Before we go any further, let me make an interesting language issue clear. When the Holy Spirit is referred to in Scripture, she is most often referred to in the 'feminine' designation in Hebrew and the 'neuter' form Greek. One could take that to mean the Holy Spirit is *neither* a he or a she, or the Holy Spirit is *fully* a he and a she. The problem is that, in English, we do not have a neuter form for gender designations of people or words. People and words are *either* a he or a she. The only designation we have in English that does not determine the gender of the subject is the word “*it*”. It seems decidedly unmannerly and unkind to call one of the persons of the Trinity an “*it*”. So for our time with the Holy Spirit, I will refer to the Spirit as “*she*” and “*her*”. This has a further benefit of raising to the surface

the feminine and motherly aspects of God's ways with us, ways which are quite Biblical as well.¹

The Holy Spirit is the most mysterious person of the Trinity, God Almighty and Jesus Christ being the other participating persons in that Holy designation. We know something already about the Holy Spirit in what we have just said. Through the Holy Spirit, we enter into the mysteries of God and creation. By knowing and experiencing more of the Holy Spirit, we do not lessen the mystery. Rather, we begin to gain some experience and trust in living within the mystery of God. Just to be clear, God is a mystery that is not meant to be solved or figured out. God is a mystery we must live into more deeply. **The Holy Spirit does this with and for us.**

In 1620, before the Mayflower left the Netherlands for the new world, Rev. John Robinson stood on the shore with his flock and told them,

“And if God should reveal anything to you by any other instrument of his, [to] be as ready to receive it as even you were to receive any truth by my ministry; for I am very confident the Lord hath more truth and more light yet to break forth”.

Robinson knew that new journeys, new insights and new possibilities create space for the light of God's work and God's word to be newly understood, newly practiced and newly interpreted. But Robinson also knew in order for more truth and more light to break forth, we need to be open to receive that new light and new truth. **The Holy Spirit does this with and for us.**

We know the Holy Spirit in particular by what she does in our lives. The Holy Spirit does stuff, a lot of stuff. The Book of Acts is a catalog and diary of what the Holy Spirit is up to in the world, in the lives of individuals and with groups of people. Throughout Scripture, she is doing things. Here are some of the verbs that describe what the Spirit does throughout Scripture:

she bears and carries,

she sends,

she leads,

she speaks,

she renews,

she intercedes,

she searches,

¹ Just to be clear, God is not male or female in the sense of sex designation. We are making a *language* distinction here and I am taking advantage of the language. The Holy Spirit is *feminine* in language, just as God is *masculine* in language reference. The best example is the Spanish language; words have gender designations. When I say *playa* (beach) in Spanish, I do not mean the beach is *female* – I mean the word is *feminine*.

she dwells,
she reveals,
she influences,
she drives,
she sanctifies,
she frees.

All that the Holy Spirit does is part of why she is so mysterious to us, however. The Holy Spirit is really the experience of God in the world, the movements of faith and hope and love within our relationships with one another. We gain understanding of the Holy Spirit by experiencing the Holy Spirit. Let me say that again, *we gain understanding of the Holy Spirit by experiencing the Holy Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit herself does this with and for us.

One of the great dangers of being a minister is the potential to spend all my time talking *about* God. I think it is easier for all of us to talk *about* God and Christ. Our hymnal, and most hymnals, by the way, is a testament to our desire to talk *about* God. The Holy Spirit, though, calls us to *experience* God. The Holy Spirit drives us into the wilderness of the unknown (Mark 1) and asks us to confront the world and be confronted by what life brings to us. The Holy Spirit sends us places we might not want to go and asks us to alter our minds and souls in the *experience* of that new place, that new experience, that new relationship. **The Holy Spirit does this with and for us.**

Jesus, in John 16, tells us the Holy Spirit will lead us into *all truth*. Quite a statement. What is *all truth*? Well, in order to find out it takes living by the Spirit to discover what is all truth. Or another way to put it is that we cannot know *all truth* without being in direct relationship with whatever that experience is. With the presence of the Holy Spirit, we will be led to discover that which points us to the reality of God and Christ in the world and in our lives. Knowing the Holy Spirit means, then, the willingness to discover and be exposed to *truth*. And we also know that in following Jesus, we will know the truth, *and the truth will set you free (John 6)*. When truth is located in a person and in our relationship with this person, we create space for the Holy Spirit to be present and do her work for the greater glory of God and Christ. **The Holy Spirit does this with and for us.**

The Holy Spirit is wily, slippery and like the winds of the sea. When you look for her, she is gone. When you identify her presence, she is pointing you somewhere else. When you want to sit and just be at peace with the presence of the Holy Spirit, you are driven out of the house to do something.

More often than not, the presence of the Holy Spirit is only known in retrospect. Remember Jacob after his dream of the angels going up and down to and from heaven? He said,

“Surely the Lord was in this place and I did not realize it!” (Gen 28:16).

This is like being in the presence of the Holy Spirit. We come through the experience, the dream, the relationship and looking back we see that surely the Holy Spirit, God, was in this place.

There are ways to make room for the work of the Holy Spirit, and there are indicators that the Holy Spirit has, in fact, been in a place even if we do not realize it. Paul gives us a list of those ways and indicators in our reading from Galatians 5:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.

When we see these 9 qualities, we know the Spirit is present. When we practice these 9 qualities, we experience the Spirit working in, around and through us.

From now until about Advent, we will try to learn about the workings of the Holy Spirit by using the fruits of the Spirit as the lens to see, experience, learn and live by the Spirit. We will spend two weeks on each Fruit of the Spirit and find out what the call of the Holy Spirit is for us as a church and each of us as individuals. My hope and prayer is that we will begin to experience glimmers, whispers, glimpses and outpourings of these fruits. By using the fruits of the Spirit as our guides we will see the action of the Holy Spirit in the:

*spirit of relationship (the fruit of love),
the spirit of life (the fruit of joy),
the spirit of prayer (the fruit of peace),
the spirit of discernment (the fruit of patience),
the spirit of care (the fruit of kindness),
the spirit of creation (the fruit of goodness),
the spirit of speech and word (the fruit of faithfulness),
the spirit of touch and healing (the fruit of gentleness) and
the spirit of liberation and freedom (the fruit of self-control).*

My personal guardrail in this exploration is simply this: we will follow the fruits of the Spirit as given to us according to Scripture, and I will seek to remain congruent to the person of Jesus Christ as we know him in Scripture. This, by the way, is a good guide for any revelation we receive and we believe it to be from the Holy Spirit. Does this new revelation conform with the Christ I know from Scripture? If so, it may very well be a calling of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit leads us into new truth and new experiences. **She does this with and for us.**

Let us pray:

O Lord, we are Your people and we are gathered in your name to glorify, experience and be led by you.

Throughout your holy word, you do this for others by sending your Spirit to them. We ask that you do this for us this day and all our days. May we become fruitful branches of your Son Jesus Christ. Like the Holy Spirit, may all our work in your name point others toward Jesus' great work and your wondrous presence within Creation and our lives. Let the Holy Spirit come upon us, opening our hearts and minds to the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control you give us. Let the great gardener, Jesus Christ, tend to us so we may bear these fruits well. In the name of the Lord Almighty, his Son Jesus Christ and their gift to us, the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.