

The Holy Spirit

John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15 & Romans 8:26-27

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Pentecost Sunday

At the beginning of God's creating of the heavens and the earth, when the earth was wild and waste, darkness over the face of Ocean, rushing-spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters (Genesis 1:1-2).

The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

When the day of Pentecost had come they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like a rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-4). And as the Spark Story Bible puts it, "This was the very beginning of the Christian church" (p. 503).

God's Spirit present at the beginning of time. God's Spirit empowering the Word to become flesh in the body of the Virgin Mary. God's Spirit birthing the church in a rush of wind and fire. God's Spirit gives life to creation, to the human Jesus, and to the church. One ancient writer describes God's Spirit this way: "...she pervades and penetrates all things. For she is a breath of the power of God ... a reflection of eternal light ... in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God and prophets ... (*Wisdom of Solomon*, 7:24-27).



Today we celebrate not just the birth of the Christian church but the presence of the Holy Spirit in our beginnings, throughout the ages, and especially now here in our midst. Later this morning/in a few minutes when our six confirmands affirm their baptismal covenant with God in Christ we will lay hands on each of them and ask God to stir up in each of these young people the gift of the Holy Spirit.

We might well wonder why we pray for the stirring up of the Holy Spirit in the lives of our young people? What does the Holy Spirit do in the hearts and minds of people? What is she good for? Today's Scriptures help us understand the role and importance of God's Holy Spirit.

In today's Gospel lesson Jesus gives the Holy Spirit a special name — *Parakletos* — which literally means the one who comes alongside, kind of like a defense attorney in a court of law who argues your case for you. Sometimes it is translated as helper, counselor or even comforter. Our text gives us “Advocate” highlighting the Holy Spirit's role of speaking on behalf of Jesus. We might think of the Holy Spirit as the voice of Jesus speaking in our hearts, minds, and consciences. It is the Holy Spirit who nudges, prompts and gives us the courage to act in Christ-like ways and to speak about Jesus to others around us (John 15:26-27).

Jesus tells us that when the Advocate comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement (John 16:8). We learn here that the Spirit is not interested only in the church and its members. She has a special task in relation to the world, the social and cultural systems in which we live. Specifically the Holy Spirit's work is to convict, convince, and expose social and cultural errors. Jesus gives three examples of things the world misunderstands.

- (1) The world/society/culture thinks that sin is all about doing immoral acts, but the Spirit teaches us that the root of sin is unbelief, a lack of faith and trust in Jesus. In other words, we cannot overcome sin by trying to be good and virtuous — that is a path doomed to failure. The remedy for sin is faith and trust — the restoration of right relations with God/Jesus/Holy Spirit leads us into right relations with one another.
- (2) The world/society/culture thinks that it is righteousness and just, but its systems, laws and values produce inequality and poverty, oppression and want, prejudice and hatred. The world/society/culture teaches us to point our fingers, to accuse and punishment each other for real and imagined wrongdoing. But in the Bible it is the devil who accuses people of sin and the Holy Spirit who comes alongside sinners to argue in their defense.¹
- (3) The world/society/culture is engaged in judging, judging, judging. In its judging, not only does the world get it all wrong, but by its actions judges itself. The powers that rule the world through fear, anger, hatred and lies are self-convicted by their words and actions that reveal all too clearly their lack of faith and trust in Jesus.

The Holy Spirit's work is to guide and lead us into the truth about God and ourselves. The truth about God is that God loves the world so much that God sent Jesus not to condemn the world but to save/heal/reconcile the whole world. The truth about ourselves is that each of us is created in God's image, claimed in the waters of baptism as a beloved child of God, worthy of love and respect, capable of making a positive difference in the world today. The Holy Spirit helps us to discern opportunities to do God's work with the gifts and strengths we have been given.

From our reading from Romans we learn that the Holy Spirit helps in our weakness. The truth is that we don't know how to be in right relations with God and Jesus. We don't even know how to

¹ John Petty at www.progressiveinvolvement.com/progressive_involvement/2012/05/lectionary-blogging-pentecost-sunday-john-15-26-27-16-4b-15.html.

pray as we ought. But the Holy Spirit knows our deepest needs, knows the mind and heart of God, and knows how much God yearns for each of us to grow into our very best child-of-God selves. So the Holy Spirit prays for us, and intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words.

Today, we give thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit who brings us to life, who dwells within us (Romans 8:9), who pours God's love into our hearts (Romans 5:5), and works tirelessly to transform us into the image of Christ (Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:17-18).

We pray for God to stir up in our youth the gift of the Holy Spirit because it is impossible to overstate her importance in the lives of believers. Recall Luther's explanation of the third article of the creed "...by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy, and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith...."

We pray for God to stir up the gift of the Holy Spirit in our youth at a transition point in their lives: no longer children they are now teenagers, moving from middle school to high school. Some of them/you already have their/your driver's permit. In a couple years they/you will have a driver's license, and a few years later will be able to vote. In other words they/you are ready to begin trying on some more adult roles, adult responsibilities, adult freedoms, adult choices. We ask God to stir up the gift of the Holy Spirit to help them make wise choices, exercise their freedoms responsibly, and especially to grow in faith and trust in Jesus.

We pray for ourselves too that we will be open to the working of the Holy Spirit in our own hearts as we continue to parent, grandparent and mentor these youth. May the Holy Spirit help us show them and tell them about the love of Jesus. Amen.