

## Welcoming the Holy Spirit into our Lives

Pentecost ~ May 31, 2009  
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### Acts 2:1-21.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

<sup>14</sup>But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men and women of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: <sup>17</sup>‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. <sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup>And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. <sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and glorious day of our God. <sup>21</sup>Then everyone who calls on the name of our God shall be saved.’

### John 15: 26 – 27; 16: 4b – 15

(Jesus said to the disciples,) “I will send to you from God the Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, who comes forth from God, and who will be my witness. You too must be my witnesses since you have been with me from the beginning.

I didn’t say these things to you at first, because I was with you; but now I am going to the One who sent me. Not one of you has asked me, ‘Where are you going?’ Yet you are filled with grief because of what I have told you.

“But the truth is this: it is to your good that I am going away. If I do not go, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I do go, I will send the Advocate to you.

“Then the Spirit will prove the world wrong about sin and about righteousness and about judgment; sin, because of the people’s refusal to trust me; righteousness, because I am going to Abba God and you will see me no more; judgment, because the Ruler of this world now stands condemned.

“I have much more to tell you, but you cannot bear it now. But when the Spirit of Truth comes, you will be guided into all truth. The Spirit will not speak independently, but will speak only what is heard, and will make known to you what is yet to come. The Spirit will bring glory to me, by drawing from what is mine and making it known to you.”

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We begin right where we left off last Sunday, which was Ascension Sunday, the day when we remembered Jesus ascending into heaven, leaving behind a band of grieving disciples.

Remember, last Sunday “Off he was. Off he was, the Savior of this world. He flew out of it, leaving it seemingly as it had been before...Before he went he had told them that it would be best for them that he go away, because, he said: “If I do not go, you would never be able to receive the Spirit yourselves; you would never be willing to acknowledge that Spirit in you, you would always remain looking at me, you would not take up any responsibility, you would gape at me.” (Joseph Donders, *Jesus, the Way*)

This is what we hear Jesus saying to his disciples in this mornings gospel lesson. “Unless I leave, I cannot send the Holy Spirit to you. And you will be dire in need of the Holy Spirit.”

And sure enough, on the tenth day, it happened. The heavens opened, a storm was heard, fire appeared, and the Holy Spirit descended. There was fire and lightning, enthusiasm and little flames, sparks all over the place. And people spoke in strange tongues and in many languages, but everyone understood that Jesus had sent the Spirit to them just as he had promised.

Who is this Holy Spirit? What is the Spirit’s origin? And what can we expect from this Spirit?

Jesus tells his disciples that he will send the Spirit even though the Spirit comes from God. So the Spirit is Jesus’ spirit, a spirit that has already been with the disciples in real life and now will be with them forever. Yet this same spirit is from God. So what can be said of God and Jesus can also be said of the Spirit, as the three interweave with each other in various patterns of saving ministry. Three in one: one in three: in Christianity it is known as the Trinity.

The fourth gospel, the gospel of John, does not have either a linear procession of the Trinity nor is it hierarchical. It is more like the image of a triple helix, intertwining in life-

giving, loving energy. Or it is like a dance in the round, with the three leaving an opening into their circle of divine love.

On your bulletin cover, you will find a picture of Andrei Rublev's 14<sup>th</sup> century icon *The Trinity*. It is one of my favorite icons because of the way that it portrays the relationship between God and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. They are in community with one another. God is on the far left. God wears a blue garment, symbolic of divinity as well as an ethereal robe. God encourages Jesus with a gesture of blessing. In the middle is Jesus Christ. He too has a blue garment, representing his divinity, but he also wears a brown garment, an earthy color, reminding us of his humanity. He extends two fingers, another indication that he is both human and divine. A gold stripe represents his royalty. And then on the right is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, too, is dressed in blue but is also robed in green, the color of new life. The Spirit points to an open space on the front of the altar that leads to the heart of God. Note how the three are all turned towards the viewer, drawing us into their relationship.

If any of you have read Paul Young's best seller, *The Shack*, you can relate to this notion of the Holy Spirit being in community with God and Jesus. The book is what I would call popular Christian fiction and has caused a huge stir among readers. Some, like Eugene Peterson claims that *The Shack* "has the potential to do for our generation what John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim Progress* did for his." Others claim that the book is an example of undiluted heresy. Perhaps we could form a study group next fall and discuss, what I'm sure, would be a variety of responses to Young's efforts.

The book has an interesting premise: Mack is a father who experienced an incredible loss (which is referred to as *The Great Sadness* in the book) ends up being "taken up" into a revelatory, vision experience in which he spends a few days with Elousia, or Papa, a large African-American woman (who represents God), a Middle Eastern carpenter named Jesus (who represents...Jesus) and an Asian woman named Sarayu (who represents... the Holy Spirit). Perhaps you can already see why the theology is deemed controversial? It is not the sensational story about Mack's loss that intrigues me about the book, although it is a clever way to invite readers into the real content of the book. Rather, it is the theology that is expounded that I found to be refreshing and hopeful. Because as Mack spends a few days with this holy Trinity, he works through his anger, disbelief, frustration while rethinking his understanding of God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

Throughout the pages of the book, Papa and Jesus and Sarayu explain to Mack that in their relationship they have chosen to limit themselves out of deference to the free will that Mack and all human creatures have been given. Theirs is not a relationship about power, but rather a relationship about serving. By limiting their power, it honors the fullness of human creation.

Speaks Sarayu, the Holy Spirit, "Mack, we have no concept of final authority among us, only unity. We are in a circle of relationship, not a chain of command or "great chain of being," as your ancestors termed it. What you're seeing here is relationship without any

overlay of power. We don't need power over the other because we are always looking out for the best. Hierarchy would make no sense among us." (p. 125, *The Shack*)

Herein lies the gift of the Holy Spirit to each one of us. Just as the Holy Spirit is not alone, is not a single event, is not separate from God or Jesus, so, now, we can never be totally alone, singular, or lonely. God and Jesus come to us in the form of the Holy Spirit. They invite us into the community that they are: they gift us with relationship, not only with them, but also with each other. The church models itself after this Trinitarian community, opening its minds, its doors, and its hearts to the fullness of diversity even as we worship "one Giver, one Lord, one Spirit, one Word, known in many ways, hallowing our days, for the Giver and the gifts, praise, praise, praise."

And when we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, transformation takes place. It is like the impact of Maria's arrival to the Von Trapp household in Roger and Hammerstein's *The Sound of Music*. As you might recall, Captain Von Trapp has become strict with his seven children as well as joyless, both as a result of the death of his wife. When Maria, an aspiring nun, arrives to serve as a governess to the captain's family, they are all too eager to test Maria, resistant to her authority. However, she quickly gains their affection and then begins to transform the Von Trapp household, largely through music. She sings. She teaches the children to sing. The captain, who had essentially banished singing once his wife had died, feels reborn at the sound of music. (*Lectionary Homiletics*, April/May 2009)

So it is with the advent of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Grief and complacency, fear and foreboding give way to new life. There is renewed strength and hope. We sense that indeed we are not alone, that through the Holy Spirit, God and Jesus are our constant companions.

Pentecost assures us that we are not alone as we move into God's bold future. Just as the Spirit came with earth-shattering, life-altering, tongue-twisting power on the day of Pentecost, so the Spirit comes to us this very day to strengthen us and to be everything that Jesus promised: helper, advocate, counselor, breath of life.

It is such Good News. The Spirit is of God and of Jesus. Jesus sends the Holy Spirit from God. Three in one. One in three. God is not alone. Jesus is not alone. The Holy Spirit is not alone. And we are not alone either, and never will we be!

Thanks be to God. Amen and Amen.