

Pentecost Sunday
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

June 8, 2014
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The Spirit of Jesus

Today is the feast of the Holy Spirit. Who is the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is the Third person of the Trinity, often referred to in the feminine. The Scripture has a lot to say about the Holy Spirit, especially in the New Testament, though she is not just a New Testament phenomenon.

A lot of illustrations have been given, and here are a few: If the Father is the Grid and the Son is the light-bulb, the Holy Spirit is the electricity. If the Father is the mystery beyond all things, and the Son is the revealer of that mystery, the Holy Spirit is what draws us to approach it. Like the wind, the Holy Spirit is the mysterious action of God wherever you encounter it, and wherever you do not.

But that's all rather ephemeral; let me make it more concrete. What does it mean to live by the Holy Spirit?

I have at my house a bank of rocks around the front. The builder of the house installed it as a decorative feature, and to support the artificial shelf of fill dirt the house is built upon. But this being the place it is, buffalo burr and other weeds now populate the area as thickly as the rocks. For the second summer in a row I will be moving the rocks, grubbing out the weeds and replacing the rocks—this year with a thick layer of mulch plastic underneath! The bank will not maintain itself alone—it quickly loses its aesthetic appeal if not maintained constantly. I must be continually invested.

God is continually vested in Creation. In John 5:17 Jesus declares that “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” St. Augustine of Hippo declares based on this verse that if God withdrew God's creative work we would cease to exist. In other words, for us to cease to exist God would not have to do something to us, but stop doing something for us. The psalmist in Psalm 104 declares: “When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.” It is the Spirit of God, then, that maintains creation.

One of the things we love about living in Silver City is the beauty of creation around us. We can sit out on calm evenings, watch the sunrise over the Black Range (at least me, not Karisse....) smell the rain on the wind, and watch the billowing clouds of the monsoons building, see the pronghorns running gracefully as fast as a car—and at the right

moments these things become numinous. They become incredibly beautiful, beyond words, full of presence and meaning and power. At these moments we have been graced to see the action of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is God constantly creating and sustaining Creation. To live by the Spirit is to open our eyes to the wonder of creation, the amazing fact that we are here rather than not here, and that God must still think our existence is a good idea!

A week ago we gathered as a community to say goodbye to three young and budding lights too soon put out. There were a lot of tears and tissues, A lot of their amazing work was shared with us. One of the things that impressed me so much was the spiritual insight some of these kids had. It's stuff I've only read in the works of the great spiritual masters of our faith, things like, and these are not quotes, but reflect the messages:

It's not what you think, it's how you love.

Religious divisions can quickly betray the god one claims to worship.

Joy in creation is a holy and transforming thing.

Where do they get this wisdom? The psalmist says, "Out of the mouth of babes thou hast ordained strength." Jesus tells us that unless we become as little children we cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven. Maybe their youth gives them an edge?

But I think there is another way they get it. In John 14:6 Jesus tells the disciples, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me." I could preach a whole sermon on this one, but that's for another Sunday. Suffice it to point out that I believe that Jesus is claiming authorship of all truth. Later in the same book, in our Gospel lesson for today, Jesus gives the disciples the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of Truth is another title used, and in Paul's writings, the Spirit of Jesus.

I don't believe for an instant that the doctrines of the faith contain all the truth known to humanity. Truth is found in a myriad of places, and all of them have their ultimate source in God. Perhaps it is by the grace of being made open and sensitive to the teaching of the Holy Spirit that these young men and women could testify to such profound truths.

The Holy Spirit is the inspiration behind all true wisdom and beauty. To live in the Spirit is to open our hearts and minds to the truth and beauty of God wherever we find it, giving praise to God for its revealing, and being willing to be surprised at its source, especially when it the source is within oneself.

Last Sunday in Sunday School we read from John 3 where Nicodemus comes to Jesus by night with a headful of questions. Jesus tells him that all who are born of the Spirit (or "from above") are like the wind—mysterious and powerful, untamable and unpredictable, yet good. We began to discuss what it meant to be born again. One person offered the theological argument that being born again means taking Jesus as one's Savior and Lord. Indeed, he is right, and we celebrate it every time we baptize, which we will do this morning. I think the Holy Spirit's work is known every time we are born again (and it happens more than once.)

- Every time we find our world too small and we must die to it and find a larger way of living we are born again—by the Holy Spirit.
- Every time we find ourselves contented in our own self-sufficiency, and something happens to knock us off top-dead-center, we have known the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Every time we are faced with a choice between ego-driven self-centeredness and the sacrifice of love, and choose love we have followed the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- Every time we stop and sit in the anxiety of the moment until the best and wisest path makes itself known we listen to the Holy Spirit.
- Every time we are willing to stand up against willful ignorance and blind injustice we work the work of the Holy Spirit.
- Every time we see in our neighbors' face the face of a child of God and love her and serve her as we would serve Christ himself, we have been led by the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is midwife to our truest selves, where we uniquely reveal the image of God. Living by the Spirit means surrendering to self-giving love, dying to the desire of the ego to rule, being willing to let God knock us out of our complacent self-sufficiency, especially spiritual, and welcoming the wonder of abundant living, loving service, and the beauty of meaning and purpose.

Pentecost is usually celebrated as the birth of the Church. If so, then, the Church is composed of those people who seek to live by the Spirit. And the Church should be a place where time after time people are brought up against the movement of the Holy Spirit and given the chance to surrender to it. We should be teaching and preaching and modeling and sharing what it means to us to live by the Spirit.

The Baptismal rite nicely expresses this ideal in the questions and answers, and in the Baptismal Covenant. And so today's invitation, as we baptize this fine young man, is to take seriously the words we speak in the Baptismal covenant, to commit ourselves to living our faith as best we can, learning by it to surrender to the Spirit of Jesus, so that we might have what it takes to bring this young man to the same choices of surrender.