

"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...All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability... All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, 'What does this mean?'" (See Acts 2)

Do you remember the story of Cinderella? It is a story of a young girl whose mother died. Her father remarries, bringing a cruel woman into her life. Cinderella is pushed into the background, silenced, and forced to do all the household chores while the others enjoy a life of leisure. That is, until Cinderella is discovered by a fairy godmother who transforms her from rags to beauty, from a forgotten creature into a princess.

Like Cinderella, the Holy Spirit has often been ignored and understated throughout Christian History. So I refer to this Spirit of God as the Cinderella of the Holy Trinity. Just take a look at the Creeds as an indication! In the Apostle's Creed, there is a good description about God the Father as the creator of heaven and earth. Then there are several paragraphs about Jesus the Son, describing his origin and time on earth. But when it comes to describing the Holy Spirit, there is only one line: "I believe in the Holy Spirit." Period!

Some two hundred years later when the Nicene Creed was adopted, a few more lines were added such as the "giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, and who has spoken through the prophets." So today, I would like to take the Holy Spirit out of the darkened corners of the Church and shine a spotlight on this "Giver of Life!" Let's begin with Jesus' farewell discourse in today's gospel reading where the Holy Spirit is introduced.

The Context: In a short time, Jesus will be crucified, bodily removed from his followers. There is a rising anxiety among his disciples, as the powers of the world (which corrupt and destroy the creatures of God) are focused on destroying their beloved leader. The disciples have so many questions running through their minds. Who will carry on Jesus' mission once he is gone? Can they still have a relationship with Jesus once he is no longer physically present? And how can they spread Jesus' message of love to future generations? Will they have the courage to move forward in the midst of a world where justice and peace is hard to come by? Where will they get the inspiration to carry on? Will they be able to remember his teachings, some of which seem to go against the conventional wisdom of the day? How will they cope with their fears? Jesus tells them: "Do not let your hearts be troubled...The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you...I will not leave you orphaned." (John 14)

We live in a time when our hearts are very troubled, especially as we witness human rights being trampled upon in our own country. Global tensions and volatile geopolitics are causing friction in the Baltic Sea. Violence and war are commonplace in Iran, Israel, the Gaza Strip, Ukraine, & Russia. There is growing unrest across Asia and Africa, while South America struggles with many challenges. Yet Jesus' words remain: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you...Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid." (John 14) As Christians, we must remember that when the going gets tough, we are not alone. We have a spiritual lifeline, a golden thread of Light that we may pull when times are hard. This golden thread of Light is the Holy Spirit who "abides with you...and in you." (John 14)

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. This is the Giver of Life, the Spirit who swept over the face of the waters from the very beginning of creation (*ruach*). It is this Spirit who inspired the prophets throughout the centuries. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, who leads us into all truth in a world where it is difficult to distinguish between truth and lies. Slandering, misleading headlines, half-truths, deception, and fake news have become part and parcel of the dis-information age in which we now live. We need more than ever to be guided by this Spirit of Truth if we are ever to realize lasting peace on earth.

The gospel of John describes the function of the Holy Spirit as God's activity in the world today. This Spirit of God advocates on Jesus' behalf; the One who not only comforted the disciples after Jesus' departure but also comforts, consoles, and guides us today. This Advocate, God's agent in bringing forth the Kingdom of God on earth, is referred to by several names in the Bible. These include Counselor, Comforter, Paraclete, Spirit of Truth, Spirit of Grace, and Spirit of Christ. These names reflect the Spirit's various roles and functions in the lives of the believers.

Unfortunately, there are many spirits out there demanding our attention, seducing us to make choices that are supposed to make us happy but fall short of their promises. So how do we distinguish the voice of the Holy Spirit from all these other voices? There are two ways in particular: By its fruit and by following Jesus' Commandment to love.

1. The Fruit: One of the ways we can discern the voice of the Holy Spirit working in our lives is by its fruit: Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. This fruit of the Spirit is the outcome of a life seeped in the Spirit. Jesus said: "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits...Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. (Mt. 7) The good news is, we can increase the fruit of the Spirit in our lives by becoming more conscious of our thoughts and more deliberate in our actions. For instance, to increase joy, we need to practice gratitude throughout the day by recognizing the abundance of blessings we have received, no matter how small. To cultivate the fruit of goodness, we simply need to be more generous with our time and money, sharing our blessings with others. If we want more peace in our lives, then we need to practice forgiveness and let go of judgment, resentment, and anger. So what fruit are you cultivating in your life today?

2. Following the Commandments: The second way we can determine the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives is when our actions align with Jesus' commandments to love. Jesus said: "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, [the Holy Spirit] to be with you forever." (John 14) Being directed by the Holy Spirit is not some metaphysical, feel-good state of mind obtained by sitting on a log in isolation. The Holy Spirit works in concert with Jesus' commandments to love which extends out into the community where true miracles can happen. His commandments include following in his footsteps by befriending the outcasts, healing the sick, speaking up for the marginalized, housing the homeless, feeding the hungry, and speaking truth to power. As a country, we are failing at many of these tasks. It's hard to believe but there are many people out there who think that Jesus is just "too woke" to be taken seriously. There is also a great temptation to live life focusing only on *me, myself, and I*, rather than reaching out beyond our comfort level to support the lost, the lonely, and the left behind. So I want to give special thanks to you, the people of St. Benedict's, who take Jesus' commandments to heart. Come Holy Spirit, come!

When I started writing this sermon, I had hoped to find articles in the Washington Post or the New York Times, that reflected the work of the Holy Spirit in our world today. Unfortunately, it was difficult to find such articles even though I know there are many people and organizations on the front lines doing risky and sacrificial acts of service. However, in the "Go Fund Me Pages," I was able to find many examples of love being extended by ordinary people in ordinary life. For instance:

- The Fitness Center in Morro Bay is sponsoring a GoFundMe campaign for one of the instructors who was diagnosed with cancer and who does not have sufficient health insurance to cover the treatment.
- A community in St. George Utah has stepped up to help an 80-year-old man who is still working as a grocery bagger in order to pay off his late wife's medical bills which amount to over \$80,000.
- And then there is my neighbor who died last week, leaving a 13-year-old dog orphaned. A nearby couple willingly took the dog under their wings, even though the dog has some health issues.

Federick Denison Maurice, a 19th C Anglican priest and philosopher, once wrote: "We have been dosing our people with religion when what they want is not this but the living God." Is there a way we can enhance our experience of this Living God and break down those barriers that hinder the Spirit's effectual working in our lives? The answer is Yes! One of the ways we can consciously open up a conduit for God's Spirit to transform our heart and mind, is by practicing the spiritual disciplines.

These spiritual practices include but are not limited to worship, prayer, silence, meditation, service to others, confession, submission, study, and fasting. While we cannot control God's grace, we can create a lifestyle where our hearts and minds are fully open to the Spirit by practicing these disciplines. Imagine the Holy Spirit as the wind that sweeps over the waters of the earth, propelling a sailboat forward. And while we cannot control this wind, we can adjust our sails to catch the wind as it blows by. This is what practicing the spiritual disciplines is all about. This is why we praise God throughout this Sunday liturgy! And it is why we continue to sing: "*Breathe on me Breath of God. Fill me with life anew. That I may love what thou dost love and do what thou wouldst do.*" (Hymn #508)