

*Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth.*

There are only a few days in the Church year that the Church brings out the *red color* we see today and which is so beautiful. And today is one of those days--the Day of Pentecost--when we especially focus on the *Holy Spirit*.

According to ancient tradition, we use color in church in order *to get our attention* and help *move our senses and our minds* in a different direction than we are accustomed. They are in that way...“signs” and “signals”...of shifts in our worship of God...and the response that God invites. And, while all these color shifts may seem quaint or precious, in a nicely irrelevant way, honestly, the wisdom of those before us is that...*we need all the help we can get*. And so, our liturgy began taking shape two millennia ago...by using words...music...dramatic action...and color...to help us...to move us...in a different direction toward God...and one another than we could have managed all by ourselves.

Maybe today we don't feel like *we need all the help we can get*. On any given Sunday, any of us might easily feel like we don't need any help from God at all...or anybody else...*thank you very much*. And we can feel that way when things are going well for us. It can be hard to talk about the Holy Spirit if we are feeling excited and hopeful on our own terms—the Holy Spirit can seem kind of irrelevant.

Or, on any given Sunday, any of us might feel like *we do need so much help* that the Holy Spirit *still* can seem kind of irrelevant. When we are mired up in our own *grief or fear*...or we find ourselves transfixed by the savagery of war in the Ukraine and Gaza...or any number of other fearsome and horrible things human beings are doing—*then the Holy Spirit can seem like some esoteric spiritual curiosity from the Church's lexicon that we just don't have time for*.

So, we can come up with all kinds of reasons to give the *Day of Pentecost* a polite and respectful nod...and then rush on past to...our great projects...or our great fears. But regardless of the Sunday, *our liturgy does not stop naming the Holy Spirit*. Despite all our reasons to shy away from speaking of the Holy Spirit...there has been a conviction from the very beginning...that the *Holy Spirit must be named*...over and over again. *Because, if we care about Jesus...then, we must attend to the Holy Spirit...because the Holy Spirit continues the spirit of Jesus in the world*.

What may be surprising to discover about the Holy Spirit is that it is far from being only an esoteric matter for clergy to think about. And the Holy Spirit also is not a concern only for Christians who lean toward Pentecostal, charismatic, or contemporary praise worship. The Holy Spirit is about a very practical matter for Christians when we take Jesus seriously...because the gospel story leaves us with a big question: *Since Christ is risen...and has ascended to God...then what's next?*

Are Christians only remembering Jesus as someone from the far away past who is long gone...until the end of our lives or the end of the world? It *can* seem that way. But what the early church began to realize *is that what God began in Jesus, God has continued in a different way with the Holy Spirit*. And so it should be impossible now for us to talk about *Jesus* without also talking about the *Holy Spirit*. After Jesus' ascension from the seen world into the unseen world, *the Holy Spirit has continued the living work and presence of Jesus in the world*.

It then takes a particular skill—which we have to learn--to be able to recognize the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the world:

- We can learn to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in the *teaching, preaching, and sacraments of the Church* where it becomes possible for us to find the life of Jesus true and compelling.
- We can learn to recognize the Holy Spirit in the *community* of the Church made up of different kinds of people who assemble around the message of Jesus.

- We can learn to recognize the Holy Spirit when we discover *moments of healing and peace* in the midst of an often comfortless and peace-less world.
- We can learn to recognize the Holy Spirit when we manage to catch ourselves *becoming imperfect instruments of Jesus' peace*.
- And this may sound so immediate that it cannot possibly be true...but we can even learn to recognize the Holy Spirit in our breath...the breath of others...and the wind that blows where it will when we are outdoors and aware of the glory of God.

And so this is where we return to the idea I spoke of last Sunday—that the Christian life is something like the children's book "Where's Waldo?". Sitting and looking at that book with a child is an interesting and enjoyable experience, as you view together a series of complex illustrations of many people and things going on, and trying to find where Waldo is in the midst of all that. And when you find him—there he is in his brightly colored (and, as it so happens: **red!**) clothing, smiling, and waving back at you. Waldo isn't hiding—he is immersed in the world of each scene.

This way of thinking about the Holy Spirit may be helpful, but also quite challenging, as we try to conceive of God in our lives and the world today. The Christian teaching of the Holy Spirit assumes a definite *No* to two things:

1. God is *not* only in the unseen world...or the end of time...seemingly far away...leaving us alone.
2. And, God is *not* hiding.

The Holy Spirit *is* God in the world...in the spirit of Jesus...in your life and mine...and in the places too of great suffering and pain. *But we have to learn how to look.*

Why God would choose to save us and the world in this way *is a very great mystery*. Because it is taking a long time...and it leaves open more time for sin and evil. But...it also leaves open more time for us...to become...partners with the Holy Spirit...in the redemption of the world.

It is not enough for us to ask every day or every week: *Well, what's going wrong now?!* If we are going to follow after Jesus...then we have to also ask some very different questions: *Where in the midst of all this is the Holy Spirit working, in the spirit of Jesus, for our healing and salvation? Where may the Holy Spirit even be calling me to do something in response?*

So, I am going to venture, myself, to say where I believe the Holy Spirit has been in my experience of this past week. Because I do believe that Jesus moves through the Holy Spirit in the real details of our lives.

- I believe the Holy Spirit is in the midst of the *excitement*...that has been emerging for what we can do to make Grace Church a more hospitable and joyful place for *children...with a new playground*...and the possibilities for making Grace a more hospitable and joyful place for *adult parishioners and the public...with new appealing ways to experience our church grounds*.
- I believe the Holy Spirit was present in the clear affection, good humor, and truth telling spoken at the memorial service I officiated for a member of our Keswick community, Mac Vanderploeg.
- I believe the Holy Spirit can participate in hard truth telling and the lament it can evoke...as I experienced in reading more about Israel and Gaza this week. The lament I felt was, as Romans says, with "sighs too deep for words"—can in fact be the Holy Spirit's intercession to God within us. Who could have imagined that, if we had not been told?!
- And I believe that in some very honest and heartfelt conversations I have had this past week, sharing good news gratefully, and bad news compassionately, that the Holy Spirit was present.

How might you venture to say, looking back on your week, where the Holy Spirit may have been present, without your realizing it at the time?...

As Christians, we are being schooled by the Holy Spirit to recognize where God continues the work of Jesus.

- The Holy Spirit is to be found in the very details of our lives—sometimes details so personal that no one else can discern the Spirit *but you alone*. And since only you alone can possibly say it, it is so important that you be able to say it.
- And sometimes the Holy Spirit is to be found in details that are so public in the arena of the world that it is hard to imagine that the Holy Spirit would be so public in calling to us...to a glad gratitude...or a hard lament.

It all comes down to...learning how to look.