

Receiving the Holy Spirit Genesis 1:1-5; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11; Psalm 29 1-08-06

This morning we are going to take a brief look at the Holy Spirit—that most elusive element of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is, to me, a facet of God revealed in many different ways through the pages of our Bible and through the pages of our lives. The hymn we like to sing on occasion, “Spirit,” gives a history of the movement of the Holy Spirit. The chorus tells us: “Spirit, spirit of gentleness, blow through the wilderness calling and free. Spirit, spirit of restlessness stir us from placidness, wind, wind on the sea.”

In this morning’s scripture readings, we first encounter the Holy Spirit in the Book of Genesis moving over the face of the waters. The Spirit was from God and is often considered to be God’s breath. From the very beginning, the Spirit of God moves where it will. It moves through the pages and lives of those in the stories of the Old Testament right into the New Testament account of the baptism of Jesus.

This Sunday on the church calendar is the day that commemorates that event. In this story we are told that the Spirit of God, in the form of a dove appears as Jesus rises from the water of the Jordan River during his baptism by John. The Spirit affirms just who this man is: “the beloved son, the one with whom God is pleased.” It is a strong affirmation, a vital acknowledgement of who Jesus is. In the Gospel of Mark we do not know if anyone else sees or hears this affirmation take place. But, that does not matter, does it? Jesus hears and understands.

Some think that at this point, Jesus was “adopted” as the son of God. It is one of the theories about the divinity of Jesus that has been around for a long time. There are four of these debatable theories that can keep those of us interested in such discussions going around and around for quite some time. Since I am supposed to let you know all I know, those theories are: Jesus was fully human, Jesus was fully divine, Jesus was born human and became divine later (at his baptism, or some even think on the cross) or Jesus was half human/half divine. Embracing one of these theories requires that we give some thought to the matter. Often we will switch from one to another depending where we are in life or where we are on our theological journeys. As a former pastor of mine often said, the resolution to the debate over this, as over other issues of religion, remained unresolved and resided in a box in his mind labeled “Awaiting further evidence.” His thought process was open-ended and he was always ready to consider new approaches to old questions.

So, the Spirit moved over the waters at the Creation and throughout the Old Testament and appeared at Jesus’ baptism. We also know that it appeared at Pentecost to a group of frightened disciples in an upper room. It nudged and encouraged them to move forward in life bearing the message Jesus had brought to all who had ears and who would listen and integrate it into their lives and beings.

In the Book of Acts, that book of the history of the early Christian church and the companion piece to the gospel of Luke, we find Paul asking the disciples if they had “received the Holy Spirit” when they believed. They must have given him very puzzled looks and told him they had never heard of the Holy Spirit. Now we might question this knowing that if they read the Old Testament they knew of the Holy Spirit. They might have meant they had no personal knowledge of this entity in their lives. Paul explains this lack by reminding them they had been baptized into John the Baptist’s baptism—the one that was by water only. That of Jesus was that of the Holy Spirit. Paul re-baptized them and they felt themselves filled with that presence.

The Spirit, which had blown across the waters and had come to Jesus during his baptism, came to those who were carrying on the mission he had started. It was present to sustain them in hours of light and in hours of darkness.

Are we aware that we have received the Holy Spirit at some time in our lives? Sometimes, “Yes,” sometimes “No.” Our scriptures would assure us we had at our baptism. But, do we

sense the presence of that Spirit every day? Some do and some don't. Some may tell us that the presence of the Spirit came to them with a palpable lightening bolt of awareness. Others have not had such an experience. However, if we do not feel the Holy Spirit moving about within and without us, that does not mean it is not there to carry us forward. It is just one of those things we are not sensitive to at certain points in life. It is like breathing, we are not aware of it, yet it is there. Always.

We have been promised the Spirit will be with us guiding and empowering us as we seek to share the good news of Christ wherever we go in our world. It is most often revealed in the way in which we view and treat others. Through gentleness and kindness and patience we are able to sense the way the Spirit moves and moves us as it moved Christ and those early disciples. Amen