

“AS WE BELIEVE, SO WE SING:
IV - ‘I BELIEVE IN THE HOLY SPIRIT . . .’”

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Genesis 1:1-5

Acts 2:1-13

Well, it's week four of my sermon series on the Apostles' Creed, and today we come to the phrase "I believe in the Holy Spirit." I have to tell you something funny as I begin this morning. Every time I think about preaching this sermon, a movie that I saw years ago comes to my mind. I'm not sure what the name of the movie was, all I remember is that in it a priest was officiating at his very first wedding, and he was a nervous wreck. I do remember that he was an Anglican priest and so he started the wedding as all Anglican or Episcopalian weddings are started, with these words:

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Only, he was so nervous, it came out like this, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spigot!" Of course, everyone in the congregation tried not to laugh, and did okay, until later in that same wedding, he pronounced the couple husband and wife, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Goat!"

Oh me! Well, let's hope I can do better than that this morning.

Today, indeed, we come to the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. In some ways, this may be the most difficult sermon yet, because you see, we get the other two parts of the Trinity pretty easily, don't we, but this one, well, maybe not so much. We get God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. We understand the God who created everything that is and was and ever will be. We understand the God who wanted to be connected to humanity so much that He sent His only Son into the world for us and for our salvation.

And we get "Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord." We know Jesus, we know His story, and we know the stories about Him. We understand Him as our Lord and Savior, because we know that He came to bring us life, and died to give us eternal life.

So we understand those two "persons" of the Trinity. When it comes to the Holy Spirit, not so much. It's not so easy to define the Spirit.

Let me tell you how our United Methodist Book of Discipline does it in our denomination's doctrinal standards. It says: "We believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from and is one in being with the Father and the Son. He convinces the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgement. He leads men through faithful response to the gospel into the fellowship of the Church. He comforts, sustains, and empowers the faithful and guides them into all truth."

The Holy Spirit proceeds from and is one in being with God and Christ. Maybe that's not so easy to grasp, until we turn to scripture, and see that lived out. In the very beginning, from the very first lines, from the very start, the Spirit is present in the very act of creation. The Spirit is at work throughout the Hebrew scriptures, leading people, convicting people, empowering people, making things happen.

The Spirit descended upon Mary and she conceived a Son who was called Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. That same Spirit descended upon Jesus in His baptism, empowering Him for the journey ahead.

Before Jesus was to go to his death on the cross, He told His disciples that even though He would be physically gone from their presence, He would send the Holy Spirit to be with them forever. And so He did, and not long after that, the Spirit descended again on the Day of Pentecost, filling the disciples and all the people with power from on high, power that helped them move mountains, take risks, form the church!

The Holy Spirit is God present with us, moving in us and through us and among us, making things happen!

Like bringing us to faith! The Holy Spirit is the One who works in our lives to bring us to that point where we acknowledge Jesus as the Lord of our life. The Spirit works in us even when we don't know it, before we're aware of it, working to draw us to the Lord. There's a fancy word for that, called prevenient grace, but it's simply the Spirit at work drawing us to the place where we come to faith.

And it's the Spirit who makes us a church. How else could you explain such a diverse group of people like us coming together and living together in love and harmony? It's the Spirit who draws us together and moves among us to make us the church.

And it's the Spirit who moves in our lives to enable us to do things we might never have thought we could do. I know that I could never get up and preach were it not for the presence of the Holy Spirit with me. And I would imagine there are things that you have done that you never thought you could do too! It's the Holy

Spirit at work in your life.

And it's the Holy Spirit who, with God the Creator, has helped to make you the uniquely gifted person that you are. Whatever gifts you possess - music, caregiving, speaking, teaching, encouraging, preaching, carpentry, knitting - whatever - it is the Holy Spirit who has poured those gifts into you, and leads you into opportunities to use them for the glory of God.

And friends, it is the Holy Spirit who stirs things up, and makes things, sometimes amazing things, happen! Look at what happened on the Day of Pentecost. The Spirit took a group of disciples, who, by the way, had badly failed Jesus when He needed them the most - the Spirit took those disciples and poured power upon them on the Day of Pentecost. And with the gifts He had given them, they went out and literally changed their world - preaching and teaching and healing, and leading the church that started that day.

As the Spirit did then, so the Spirit still does today. One preacher put it this way:

“Whenever two plus two does not equal four but five - whenever you find yourself speaking with eloquence you did not know you have, or offering forgiveness you had not meant to offer - whenever you find yourself taking risks you thought you did not have the courage to take, or reaching out to someone you had intended to walk away from - you can be pretty sure that you are learning about the Holy Spirit, and more than that, you are taking part in it, breathing in and breathing out, taking God into you and giving God back to the world again, with some of you attached.” (Barbara Brown Taylor, “The Gospel of the Holy Spirit,” *Home By Another Way*, p. 147)

One thing is for sure, my friends, though you might not be able to define who the Holy Spirit is if someone asks, you should be able to say that you have felt Him move in your life at some point in your life. Maybe it was when you put a candle on the water at Camp Pecometh during the Galilean service, or when your heart was moved like never before on an Emmaus weekend, or when you spoke to someone you had been estranged from, or when you changed careers or went off to school, or when you stood at the altar to marry the love of your life, or offered your baby for baptism, or when you weren't sure what to do one minute, and then you felt the Spirit move you and you suddenly knew what to do.

The Holy Spirit - God present with us, guiding us, inspiring us, encouraging us, dwelling with us through every moment of our lives. Yes, we believe in the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity - God in our midst.

May He pour down upon us and fill us now as we prepare to come to the table of our Lord and receive this holy meal. And may He remain with us as we go out into the world to be faithful disciples and willing witnesses to God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.