

Pentecost Reflections on the Holy Spirit

Acts 2:2-21

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Reflection by Rev. Todd Freeman

I hold in my hand an original typed sermon preached by the Rev. Dr. Harold Hill, a legendary professor of religion at the University of Tulsa, and the father of our own Marilyn Hill. Dr. Hill was a very important part of this congregation and certainly a mentor to myself. He wrote this sermon in 1975, 42 years ago. It's a Pentecost sermon entitled, "That's the Spirit." There is one paragraph that I would like to share with us as a congregation today, especially as it relates to our own mission.

"If we study the first part of that story of the beginning of the church called "the acts of the apostles", we see that two things are closely hooked up with one another. One is the coming of a new surge of power. The other is that of applying the power to the immediate social tasks of their own world. The power to do and the obligation to do. They go together. We will never get the point about what happened on that ancient festival of Pentecost in an upper room in Jerusalem unless we understand that the rushing wind and the tongues of fire were not to dazzle and amaze, but to get people about the tasks of the world outside of that upper room. The disciples, to put it another way, got the power from God when they faced the command of God. Pentecost actually got under way before the followers of Jesus assembled in that upper room. It began when they gave up looking into the skies into which they had seen their savior ascend and turned their faces toward the human battle ground called Jerusalem. When they did that, they really faced the world of need, of danger, of opportunity."

We are called to do no less in our ministry here in Tulsa!

(Followed by Hymn #280 – *Come, O Spirit, Dwell Among Us*)

Reflection by Gini Fox

Before I begin I need to give a little disclaimer in that as I go through life, and certainly as I prepared to do this, I had to discern and weave through my political and faith journeys at this time and how they intertwined. So you might hear that in this.

When I began thinking about the meaning of Pentecost in my contemporary life, the word tribalism came to mind – that is the disturbing and increasing prevalence of tribalism everywhere, it seems to me. Just what happened at Pentecost that made tribalism pop into my head? Spirit empowered those ancient and disparate believers in Jesus to all

praise God in many new, and unlearned languages, according to the account as told in the book of Acts. Symbolically, this miracle reinforces the multilingual, multicultural, multiracial mission of the church. We are called to be a community in which all people are drawn together by God's love. As Paul writes in Galatians: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female: for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

So... what does this mean for us? Obviously there are exceptions, but it seems that the church has not, in general, lived out its multilingual, multicultural mission. We are often divided according to language, race, and ethnicity. Pentecost challenges all of us to examine our own attitudes and to reject any prejudice that lurks within us, and to open our hearts to all people, even and especially those who do not share our language and culture. You are right – this is hard. But it is central to our calling. And it is something the Spirit of God will help us do if we make ourselves available to that Spirit.

Following up the miracle of Pentecost, Peter explained the Spirit would be given to all believers. This was remarkable because in the Old Testament, it was priests, prophets, and kings to whom Spirit was bestowed. In the New Testament, the Spirit would be given to all people and they would be empowered to minister regardless of their gender, age, or social position. The church would be a place where every single person matters, regardless of the gifts they receive, and every member can and will, in both quiet or loud ways, contribute to the health and mission of the church – this church.

So... Personally, we all can ask, am I serving God with the Spirit that has been given to me – using it not only in the gathered church but also in my daily path of living for God in the world? Pentecost is a time to ask God to fill us afresh with Spirit that we might be the ones to generously share that Spirit, so readily accessible to us, and be the change in the church and in the world that we long for.

(Followed by Chancel Choir anthem – *Come, Breath on Me* by Dana Mengel)

Reflection by Bill Nole

My reflection this morning is a bit of a mash-up. I have early-20s children who are amazed that I would use that word this morning. The idea is that this would be words brought together from a blogger from a Catholic website, named Rebecca Ruiz, words from Pope Francis, and words from me. So they are mashed together in what I hope will be something for us all to think about.

From Leave Room for the Holy Spirit - a Reflection by Rebecca Ruiz

When I sat down earlier this month to think about my New Year's resolutions, I wrote three columns on a piece of paper: Mind, Body, and Spirit.

As I was contemplating my Spirit column on the page, I kept remembering Pope Francis's frequent admonitions to leave room for the Holy Spirit.

While I did want to include this in my list of resolutions, I struggled with how to fit this concept into the column. I'm accustomed to listing specific, concrete, and

quantifiable actions like, "I will pray every night," or, "I will help at the food pantry twice each month." I just couldn't nail down the specifics of, "I will leave room for the Holy Spirit." How would one quantify this? What are the steps one would take to accomplish this? *How could I fit the Holy Spirit into the box?*

Fortunately, Pope Francis offers advice about this very dilemma:

Newness always makes us a bit fearful, because we feel more secure if we have everything under control, if we are the ones who build, program, and plan our lives in accordance with our own ideas, our own comfort, our own preferences. This is also the case when it comes to God. Often, we follow and accept God, but only up to a certain point. It is hard to abandon ourselves to God with complete trust, allowing the Holy Spirit to be the guide for our lives ... Let us ask ourselves today: Are we open to "God's surprises"? Or are we closed and fearful before the newness of the Holy Spirit?

If we are going to leave room for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives, it's not just about listing quantifiable actions. The spiritual life is a relationship between God and us—God loving us, God calling us, and God waiting for us to respond to God's invitation. When we leave room for the Holy Spirit, we say yes to being an active listener to God's whispers in our heart. We say yes to seeing with the eyes of the heart as we witness God's love displayed for us throughout the day in countless small ways. And we say yes to responsiveness, openness, and flexibility to the unpredictable stirrings of the Spirit—the Spirit which brings surprises that are greater than we could ever plan or imagine. The Holy Spirit just doesn't fit neatly in a box on a page.

Some of us struggle with how to respond when things in our lives don't fit into the box on the page that we have prepared for them...it can make us uncomfortable. And sometimes we look for ways to make them fit into our pre-conceived notions. Pope Francis encouraged us all to be open to the Holy Spirit's surprises, even when...or especially when... they may make us uncomfortable.... uncomfortable individually or as the church.

God, who created the world, continues to work in it, surprising people and making some of them nervous.

The phrase "it's always been done this way" reflects an attitude that kills. "This kills freedom. It kills joy. It kills fidelity to the Holy Spirit, who always is at work, leading the church."

Our faith is a journey guided by the Holy Spirit, who helps the church grow in understanding. Our faith is in motion, it grows and spreads. Christians need to ask for "the grace of discernment so they do not take the wrong path or fall into immobility, rigidity or a heart that is closed" to God's surprises.

This year, I have resolved to pray for the grace to welcome God's surprises. I want the kind of heart that is responsive to the whispers of the Spirit, a "Yes-Lord-I-am-listening...surprise me" kind of heart. And, for that kind of heart, I need to leave room for the Holy Spirit.

(Followed by Hymn #287, vv 1, 3, 5 – *Gracious Spirit, Heed Our Pleading*)

Reflection by Stefanie Olson

A request went out for some people to participate today and speak on the Holy Spirit, and when I was asked I said, "Okay". And then I was like, "Oh crap, what did I just agree to do?" So at breakfast, with the kids and Glen, I said, you know the kids are always full of wisdom, "Hey, what do you know about the Holy Spirit?" (silence from the kids) [silence in the congregation] Exactly the response I got. After a few minutes Glen said, "Bueller? Bueller?" So I left breakfast and started typing, praying that the Holy Spirit would fill me with some good thought, and this is what I came up with.

The holy spirit is a dream that comes to us unexpectedly. Revealing mystery upon mystery, a circular knot of knowing that undoes itself when known.

It is the intangible part of our being that flows within and through us, unnoticed, until

It is noticed.

Like the tender skin under your fingernails. Content to be there, present since your time began, held in place, made of flesh and blood, unnoticed until it is

Noticed

after the rip of nail or crush of flesh.

Then it becomes the center of all notice. Then it becomes the most important thing in the universe that won't let us rest until we have come to a new understanding of our current reality.

The spirit is the observer of time, but not confined by time, as it sees what has been, what is, and the river of possibility that is to become

Our now.

The spirit is the gift-dream, made manifest in an insignificant night, within the mind of an insignificant girl. A gift-dream of knowing in a single moment that all we are called to be

is held within the Christ,

and shared freely with us in a breath, that when taken becomes the flesh of all possibility. This gift dream becomes the flesh underneath the nails of the girl.

The holy spirit is a choice, to be welcomed into your mind and place in time, to be honored by your invitation to take part in the day to day

drudgery, mystery, work, birth, energy, thought, collaboration, dreaming of what could be,

understanding of what was,

and seeing the things that should not be apparent to the mind, but make perfect sense to the heart.

The spirit unravels the concept of defining, as an exercise of understanding the unknown.

Consider the Grand Canyon.

How can I define this for you?

It was cold and rainy, and far away, but I saw the sign. I saw the words printed in big letters, pointing the way I could turn. It would have added hours to our trip, already filled with the separation of a life know, travels through a beauty never before seen, the air in my car scented by the cat companion who settled uneasily on the dashboard.

I followed my brother on that trip across the country, helping him move to his new home, staring at the back of a U-Haul for days, knowing my baby was at home wondering where I was. I prayed he understood I was coming back, I had not abandoned him, at the same time feeling guilty for enjoying my adventure with my twin.

My experience with the Grand Canyon is nothing like the experience my friend shared with me. A time of open, clear sky. The land an array of colors and hues combined in ways that only a master could conceive. The air that blew through her hair had traveled far and had a force that made her want to stay far from the edge of the chasm, a place that had surely devoured others before her.

The holy spirit is an experience that happens to and through you, an experience that you can spend a lifetime trying to define and explain to others. Never Mind the confusion and disbelief they might sketch on their face when you attempt to form the words. What can we tell them other than

It

Is

Something

only you can experience.

Something only you can invite back into your place in time, your soul and mind and body.

The Holy Spirit is

With you now

And always was

And always will be.

Open your heart and mind now to the experience that is yours and yours alone. Let go of trying to define it and trust that it is your gift-dream, given freely to you.

(Followed by Hymn #286 – *Breathe on Me, Breath of God*)