

Sunday, May 23, 2021
Sermon: The Holy Spirit: Divine Glue
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Acts 2:1-21

I wanted to begin this sermon today with the gospel reading from Acts about the first day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came and blew throughout the community. The Holy Spirit is often an aspect of God that we don't pay a whole lot of attention to. It's often a confusing aspect of God. What is the role of the Holy Spirit? What does she do for us and for the world? And so I wanted to read this gospel reading for today from the Gospel of John Chapter 15. Jesus is preparing his disciples once again for when he will no longer be with them. But he is not abandoning them. He says that he will send the Holy Spirit to be with them.

He calls the Holy Spirit here the advocate, the one who will be with them and advocate for them on their behalf during difficult times. Here is what the Gospel of John says, "When the advocate comes whom I will send to you from the Father, the spirit of truth, who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning." Jesus says, "I have said these things to you to keep you from stumbling. We will put you out of the synagogues. Indeed an hour is coming when those who will kill you will think they are doing so as they are offering worship to God. And they will do this because they have not known the Father or me, but I have said these things to you that when their hour comes, you may remember I told you about them."

I wanted to read this to you because I think Jesus is giving us a new view on what the Holy Spirit is. You see, throughout the Bible we are introduced to the Spirit over time and Jesus here gives us a new name for the Spirit, a new name for God, which is the Advocate, one who is always with us, by our side advocating on our behalf during difficult times. We see this throughout the scripture passages, throughout what the Bible is trying to tell us about the Holy Spirit.

In the beginning, when God creates human beings out of clay, in Genesis Chapter 2, it says that God breathed into them. The word for breath in Hebrew is ruah. Ruach means breath, but it also means Spirit. And so, when God is breathing the divine ruach, the divine breath, into the humans, God breathes God's very spirit, the Holy Spirit, into humanity, giving humanity life. And this is so important for us to understand because throughout the ancient world, there were people who were thought to be filled with the Holy Spirit. There were people who were thought to be created in the image of God. But those people were always thought to be somehow special, more special than others, and here at the very beginning of the creation of human beings it says that all people have breath of God in them.

This is one of the ways in which the Bible is leading us to see that it's not just the powerful rulers like many ancient cultures thought who had the divine breath, the divine spark, the divine image within them. No, it's also your poor neighbor, it's also those who are homeless, it's those who don't look like

you who have the divine image in them, who also have the divine breath, the divine Spirit within them. It's your black neighbor, it's your brown neighbor, it's your Palestinian neighbor, it's your Jewish neighbor, it's your undocumented immigrant neighbor who is created in the very image of God, who has the divine breath within them. That is where we find the Holy Spirit in this world, not somewhere out there, but as close to you as you are to your breath. As close to your neighbor as your neighbor is to their breath. That's where you find the Holy Spirit in this world. And as the scriptures continue, it says that the prophets speak with the Holy Spirit. They're motivated by the Holy Spirit. They're imbued with the Holy Spirit but speak God's words. And what is God's words? It's a reminder of this truth in Genesis Chapter 2. Why? Because the prophets frequently say that the role of the king of the political systems is to care for those who are in need. It is to remember those who are in need, the poor, the weak, the marginalized, the widows and the orphans. Why do the prophets do this? Because they know that those who are vulnerable in our midst often go ignored, and they know that the vulnerable and the marginalized in our midst are just as created in the image of God and have the breath of God, the Spirit of God within them, too.

That's the prophetic message that we find throughout the Hebrew scriptures. And then we have Jesus who comes to us and says that the Holy Spirit is the Advocate. The Greek word that is used here is *paraclete*. *Para* means "alongside of" in Greek, and *clete* comes from the word *kaleo* which means "to call out." The *paraclete* is the Holy Spirit, the part of God that is with us, that is by our side and calling out on our behalf, advocating for us. But as Jesus says, advocating particularly on behalf of those who are marginalized. Advocating on behalf of our Palestinian siblings who are suffering violence. Tragically, our Jewish siblings have been experiencing a rise in anti-semitism during the last month. The Holy Spirit advocated for our Jewish siblings, too.

Here in the United States, it was not that long ago where we had people marching in our streets, "The Jews will not replace us!" As we fight and struggle for our Palestinian siblings, we also need to fight for and struggle for our Jewish siblings who are experiencing a rise in anti-semitism. That is where we find the Holy Spirit. How do we know this? Well, in part, because of Pentecost. This day that is the birth of the church. You heard the list in the reading earlier today that Luke, the author of Acts, goes through the list. He doesn't just say that there were "people from all around the world." He names the list - the Parthians, the Medes, the Elamites, and the residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia. Why didn't Luke just say "people from all around the world" were there? Because he has to name it. He has to name these specific individual places so that we get this fact of diversity within this early Christian movement that was filled with people from all around. And in this diversity, they had a sense of unity because the Holy Spirit breathed in each one of them as it breathes in each of you hearing this, and it also breathed among them. It was the glue that was uniting them together in the spirit of love, in the spirit of advocacy, to advocate for one another.

When Peter tries to explain what's going on, he refers back to one of the prophets in the Jewish tradition, he says that it's like when the prophet Joel says in the last days, "God declares I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh." Do you see the universality in this? All flesh. This is religion. This is the early church movement becoming universal. This is the early church movement saying "all flesh." Back then they said it was Parthian flesh, Medes flesh, Elamite flesh, Judean flesh and Cappadocian flesh. Those words mean not very much to us today so we might say instead - on Palestinian flesh, on Israeli flesh,

on Christian flesh, on Jewish flesh, on Muslim flesh, on Atheist flesh, on Hindu flesh, on gay flesh, on lesbian flesh, on transgender flesh. The spirit of God is falling on all flesh and leading all of us, all flesh, into the realm of God. And sometimes, all flesh might make us a little uncomfortable. Sometimes, I may not want someone else's flesh to be invited to the party and I might get resentful. I might get upset because I thought that this truth was mine and thus it didn't belong to them.

Sometimes, I can start feeling that way and when I do, it's important for me to take a step back and remember that this isn't about me. This isn't about my group of people. This is about something so much bigger because if you continue reading the book of Acts, you will find that the early church community, the Holy Spirit, drove them out into the world to encounter other people, other flesh, that made them uncomfortable. And as our Minister of Justice and Witness, Amira, beautifully reminds us, part of our job is to sit in that discomfort and be reminded that it's okay. Because the spirit of God has descended upon all flesh. The spirit of God that was there at the beginning of creation, that living, that empowered, that brought to life all human flesh is the same Spirit that brings us together in this community, that unites us, that surrounds us in the spirit of love, and the spirit that advocates for one another. May we live into that spirit now and forevermore. Amen.