

Holy Curiosity: All About the Holy Spirit

June 5, 2022

Bendersville & Wenksville United Methodist Churches

John 14:15-20

Happy Pentecost, my friends!

Today has to be one of my absolute favorite days on the church calendar. And it is a celebration that I think is very much underrated. In the church, we do a really good job of celebrating Jesus (as we should) – celebrating Jesus’s birth at Christmas; remembering his death (during Holy Week); and then celebrating Jesus’s resurrection at Easter. And telling all of the amazing stories in-between. We talk a lot about God the Father. We tell the story – all the time – of God creating the world and everything in it; we tell the stories of God’s care for the Israelite people throughout the Old Testament. We pray to God, and very often approach God as we might approach a Father, some of us even addressing God as Father.

But there is a third person of the Trinity that, at least in United Methodist circles, does not get nearly as much air time in our preaching, or in our reading, or in our prayers. Maybe that’s because scripture does not tell us nearly as much about this person. Or maybe, it’s because we just simply have a hard time wrapping our minds around what this part of the Trinity looks like, or acts like, or does. And yet, this is who we celebrate today, on the day of Pentecost. The Holy Spirit.

Today we are finishing up our sermon series titled “Holy Curiosity,” where we have spent the last seven weeks exploring themes and topics that you, as members of the congregation, have specifically *asked* to explore. Some of them have been hard questions; others, obscure stories; and still others, timely themes in light of the events of today’s world. And I think it only appropriate that we wind up our series today, on the day of Pentecost, exploring one final question that is *absolutely pivotal* for our lives of faith: Who is the Holy Spirit, and how, exactly, does the Spirit work inside of me?

I love this question. Because it is at the same thing both theological and practical. And even the very nature of the question itself gets to the core of who the Holy Spirit is.

So first off, we will start with the theology piece. Who is the Holy Spirit?

Well, to answer that question, we have to back up a step or two and ask another question: Who is God?

As Christians, we believe that God is *one* God, who reigns supreme over all that exists, has ever existed, and ever will exist. God is creator of everything; God has redeemed and is redeeming everything that has ever gone sideways in life; and God sustains us, the world, and the universe in which we live.

We also believe that this one God exists in three persons, or three “forms,” if you will. That gets a little bit complicated and confusing and there are no perfect ways to explain this, but sometimes I like to think of God like I think of water. Water exists in three different forms: solid, liquid, and gas. Water exists as the water we drink; water exists as steam; and water exists as ice. Each one of these different forms of water are very much *water*. They all have the same molecular structure. But the way that we experience these different forms of water, and the way that we use them, is different. We put ice in a glass of lemonade to cool it off. We drink liquid water, or use it to clean things. We might use steam to get the wrinkles out of a piece of clothing.

In much the same way, God exists as three persons. Three different forms. All three of them are God. They are not separate from each other, any more than water, steam, and ice are separate. But the ways that we experience them are different.

God exists as Father. Or as creator. The source of all life. God through whom we exist. God exists as Jesus. This is God whose stories we read about in the gospels. God who came to earth as a human being and lived among us. Lived as one of us. So that we might have access to the fullness of the presence of God both now and forevermore. Died on our behalf and rose again.

And God also exists as the Holy Spirit. Simply-stated, the Holy Spirit is God *inside* of us. The person of the Trinity who we interact with most-closely on a day-to-day basis. God active and alive; working and moving and breathing within our lives and in our stories every moment of every day.

So that’s who the Spirit is. But I think part of what this question was getting at was not the *theological* answer – but more the practical one. Namely, what is the work of the Holy Spirit in *my* life? How can I tell when the Holy Spirit is speaking to me? Or inviting me into something? How can I differentiate between God’s Spirit moving in my life, and my own needs and wants and desires?

What is the practical impact of who the Holy Spirit is, on who I am?

So, to get at that question, I would like to turn to two different scriptures. One of them we read today, and one of them we did not. The first scripture comes from the gospel of John, chapter 14. One of the first places where Jesus speaks explicitly about the Holy Spirit. Jesus knows that his disciples have grown really attached to him, and have come to rely heavily on him. He knows that his followers have come to equate their relationships with God with their relationship with him. He knows that his death is going to be absolutely devastating to them, and it will cause them to question everything they thought they knew about themselves, about Jesus, and about God.

And so, knowing what is coming, Jesus makes his followers a promise.

“You are never going to be alone. I will never abandon you. When I ascend to the Father and am no longer standing here in front of you in bodily form, the Spirit of God will take

up residence inside of you. Your spirit and God's Spirit will be intertwined, so that you would not be able to separate yourselves from God if you tried.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be closer to God than anybody has ever been. Closer than Moses was when he was speaking to the burning bush. Closer than Elijah was when he was reigning down fire from heaven. Closer than Jonah was when he was getting swallowed up by giant fish, and closer than Daniel was when the angels came and shut the mouths of the lions.

Through the Holy Spirit, you will be closer to God than you are even right now. And right now, you are standing face-to-face with God in human form and talking to him. Closer even than that, Jesus is telling them.

Because your heart and God's heart will be interconnected. "On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you." Therefore, your voice will be my voice. Your hands will be the Father's hands. God will show up in the world *through you*. You will be my vessels, the ones who will carry on my message of love and grace until the very end of time.

And then, in our second scripture for today – the one that we did not read – we get a picture of what that looks like. What happens when the Holy Spirit shows up.

In the book of Acts chapter 2, Jesus has just ascended into heaven. The believers were all gathered together, trying to figure out what in the world to do next when the walls of the house started to shake and tremble with the rush of a violent wind. Then fire started to rain down from heaven, coming to rest upon the heads of each one of the people and their mouths and their hearts and their minds burst open. The Holy Spirit entered into every heart. And all of a sudden, people who could not understand one another, could understand each other. Language was no longer a barrier. Age, no longer a barrier. Gender, not an issue. Race, nationality, creed – nonissues. People who could not have been more different from each other came together, all speaking their own languages, but being fully-understood; fully-known; fully-received by everybody else.

And God said: this is church. This is my body. This is what happens when my Spirit shows up and the people are ready to receive.

When God is moving inside of us and acting among us, we begin to see little glimpses of the kingdom of God coming to rest here on earth.

And here's what that looks like:

1. We learn how to love. Most especially, we come to love those who are the most different from us. Those with whom we have a hard time seeing eye-to-eye.

2. We learn how to share what we have with those who have nothing, so that everyone will have something. We become more generous as people, and learn to think beyond our own desires to the needs of others.
3. And we learn how to express joy. Even through and in the midst of pain, sadness, suffering, sorrow, uncertainty, grief, and all of life's circumstances that threaten to come in and steal our joy, joy will well up anyway from someplace deep inside of us.

Pentecost is one of my favorite, favorite days of the church year, because it reminds us not just that God has been born among us; not just that Christ is risen and has redeemed us; but that God is here, in our midst. God is moving and acting and breathing. And when we look upon the faces of one another, we see the image of God staring back at us.

Pentecost is a reminder that God works even through us imperfect people, and that even when we mess things up, God is still at work restoring love and generosity and joy to us.

Pentecost reminds us that as the church, we have a lot of work to do, being God's hands and feet in the world. Shining God's light into all of the dark places of the world. Sharing God's love with those who feel unloved. And yet, this work is profoundly life-giving and, even though it can be hard, it is joy-instilling.

And above all, Pentecost reminds us that even though we may not still see burning bushes or shining angels or pillars of fire in today's world; even though Jesus is no longer here in the flesh for us to see and talk to and ask questions of, God has not left this world. And God is, in fact, closer to us than we can even imagine.

So today, may we know that the Spirit of God dwells within each one of us. May we know that even though we may at times feel lonely in today's world, we are never alone. May we know that God is at work within us, bringing God's image to rest upon each of our souls. And may we discover a love, a heart of compassion, and a joy welling up within us that knows no end.