

Sermon Starter – Celebrate the Spirit

Numbers 11:24-30, Psalm 104:24-35, Acts 2:1-21, 1 Corinthians 12:3-13, John 20:19-23, John 7:37-39

Today we learn that the Holy Spirit is a gift—it is sent, it is received, it “rests” on God’s people. Yet we have to confess that this gift is often neglected in our study and theology. There are any number of reasons for our lack of attention to the third person of the Trinity, perhaps chief among them our fear of what we don’t understand. There is an undeniable aspect of mystery to the Spirit. Scriptural metaphors for God or Jesus are most often relational and intimate: God is Father, Jesus is brother and son. But metaphors for the Spirit—flame, wind, fire, cloud, water—are drawn from natural elements, impersonal forces that resist our control.

We also may fear speaking of the Spirit because we fear such conversation will expose or deepen theological divisions. Yet Scripture clearly presents the Holy Spirit as a gift, something to be celebrated rather than feared, something to be received with joy rather than reticence. Indeed, in Scripture we find that the Holy Spirit brings unity rather than division. At Pentecost, as the Spirit is poured out, it unifies believers across lines of gender, generation, race, and class. Paul’s letter to the Corinthian church emphasizes that the Holy Spirit gives gifts not for individual use but for the common good.

It’s also interesting that in both the Old and New Testament texts for today, the Holy Spirit comes to God’s gathered community. The power of the Holy Spirit in our midst serves to strengthen rather than divide the believing community. On this day of Pentecost, may we set aside our fears and embrace the Spirit’s presence. Like those believers in Acts, may we be empowered to “declare the wonders of God.”

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