

Devotion – Week of January 30, 2022

Rev. Jeanne Simpson

This past Sunday we looked at Jesus' baptism, "when the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove." Earlier John the Baptist had told the people he was baptizing them with water, but the one coming after him would baptize them with the Holy Spirit and fire.

The Holy Spirit can be a hard concept for us logical 21st century Americans to grasp. In Greek the word is "agio pneuma." We get the word pneumatic from the word from "pneuma." The word can also mean wind or breath and is directly related to the Old Testament Hebrew word for wind or breath or spirit, "ruach." In Genesis, God's "ruach" breathes over the formless void and the first thing that this "ruach" creates is light. God's "ruach" creates everything over those first 6 days. Old Testament references abound with God's breath or spirit intervening to provide creation or miraculous events. God breathes into the clay model of the man in Genesis 2 and brings him to life. It appears over 400 times in the Old Testament. And God is always the initiator to perform some action – such as creation or destruction. God inspires people in the Old Testament and gives them special power with God's "ruach."

In the New Testament the Holy Spirit, or "agio pneuma" in the Greek, is introduced to indicate God's intimate presence with people. We first read of the Holy Spirit descending upon Elizabeth when Mary comes to visit her. She recognizes that Mary is carrying the Savior. The Holy Spirit descends upon Simeon in the temple when Mary and Joseph come to dedicate their newborn baby. Simeon also recognizes that this child is the Savior. John the Baptist predicts that Jesus will baptize the people with the Holy Spirit. And then the Holy Spirit descends upon Jesus and a voice is heard saying, "you are my beloved son." The Holy Spirit becomes an active agent in the New Testament to bring God's message and blessings for Jesus and his followers. Jesus comes back after his death to visit the disciples and breathes the Holy Spirit into them. And the Holy Spirit descends upon the early believers on the day of Pentecost like tongues of fire.

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit becomes an active part of the Trinity. Jesus tells his followers that after he is gone he will send the "Paraklete," or "Comforter," to them so they will not be alone. The Holy Spirit is used over 370 times in the New Testament to indicate this helper or comforter who speaks to Paul or other apostles, or who guides them in their ministry.

We don't talk a lot today about the Holy Spirit coming to visit us or appearing to us in a dream. But we do acknowledge that God sends God's Spirit among us to guide us or inspire us, even though we may not see a physical manifestation of it. Although I can't say I've ever directly felt the presence of the Holy Spirit, I can look back at events and recognize that it was there guiding me. It's awe-inspiring to me to know that Jesus has sent the Holy Spirit to us as a helper or comforter. I sometimes pray for the Holy Spirit to descend upon my heart, and when I feel a sense of peace, I believe that it is there with me. I hope you have that experience also when you need guidance or comfort. I hope you will call upon the Spirit to come to you, when things seem muddled and depressing. May that peace descend upon you.

Jeanne