

Sermon for May 29th 2011 John 14 15-21

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Do say Holy Ghost or Holy Spirit? Have you ever really even thought about it? As you just heard and as you hear every time I preach – I say “father, son and Holy *Spirit*”. There have been times when I have wondered why some say ghost and some say spirit and some say both, but I hadn't thought about it too much until I began preparing for this sermon. As a matter of fact this gospel lesson got me thinking a lot about the Holy Spirit altogether.

Anyway – a little trivia for you – Holy Ghost is written 59 times in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer – every one of them either in the Rite One services, traditional prayers, or the historical documents- so for you rite oners you are probably accustomed to holy ghost.

Holy Spirit is written well over 100 times throughout the Book of Common Prayer, especially in the contemporary prayers, Rite II services and the baptismal liturgy. Holy Ghost is not said at all in the rite II liturgies so for you rite twoers you are probably used to holy spirit. Either way – our gospel lesson today has an awful lot to tell us about this third member of our Trinitarian Godhead.

In the gospel lesson for last Sunday, which was the text in Chapter 14 of John that came just before this morning's text, Jesus began to address the question of how he would be present with the disciples after he left them. John continues to address the question in the text we heard today by exploring how Jesus and the Holy Spirit are interrelated. In this passage and several others in the next two chapters of John we find Jesus has promised to be present with his people from that day forward. He has promised to send his own spirit in his own breath, his own inner life.

Here, and for the next two chapters, he uses a special word to describe the spirit. That word is paraclete which can be translated as “the one called alongside”, the advocate, the counselor, the comforter. This paraclete is the spirit of truth, the truth of God's love shown to us through Jesus.

The gospel lesson we heard this morning is a part of Jesus' farewell discourse at the last supper and Jesus is describing to the disciples the emptiness and the great personal loss they will feel when he leaves them. He tells them that he is leaving but this is not the end of their relationship. He assures them that he will not leave them desolate. He is describing his death and his resurrection and the coming of the paraclete, the spirit of truth, who will comfort them and dwell in them.

Jesus assures John's community in the first century just as he assures us that we need not wait only for Jesus' 2nd coming. He comes to us every day. The life that is in him becomes life

in us, life that is God's gift of love. Our love is a response to God's love for us and our lives become lives of love for others.

In a couple weeks I will be going on a mission trip with the Junior Youth and 4 other adult leaders. One of my favorite things about these trips is when we get together in the evening after a day of work and we talk about our highs and lows of each day and then we each take a turn saying where we saw Christ that day.

The answers often bring me to tears. The Christ seen is no doubt seen through people because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that we hear about in this gospel lesson and in it we see the love of God that lives and moves and has its being in us.

All of us become aware of the Holy Spirit living in us in all sorts of different ways. Sometimes we become aware of the spirit living in us when we come to church or to the communion rail. Sometimes we become aware through songs or hymns.

Sometimes through the beauty of this world, the nature around us. Sometimes through hardship, sometimes through joy and many times through the gift of love from another.

Jesus explains to his disciples that when he goes to the father, when he defeats the powers of death through his own death and resurrection, with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, then all sorts of new possibilities will be opened in front of them. The works he has been doing as he says again and again are evidence that the father is at work in him. Now he says that the disciples will continue that work with the guidance, help and comfort of his own spirit in them.

Commitment to Christ along with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit moved the disciples out of their comfort zones and does the same for us today.

That certainly rang true for me in the summer of 2003 when I was in the middle of discerning this call to the priesthood. I was comfortable – I had a decent job, a beautiful little girl and wonderful husband, a comfortable house in a nice suburb of Chicago. All of these things played over in my mind as I asked God over and over again if he really wanted me to pursue this call but even more than that the fear that came with leaving that world of quietly living my faith to go into a world where I would have to be preaching and teaching it front and center had me in deep turmoil.

One of the most distinct memories in my life of knowing the presence of the Holy Spirit in me was that summer of 2003 when I was wrestling with all those questions. It was on a sunny July day at a family Christian camp in Arcadia Michigan. During one of the morning bible studies I was wrought with doubt about agreeing to have a discernment committee formed at my church and pleading with God for the right answer.

As I was asking God for help, I heard the pastor who was teaching the class say something and it was as if God was speaking directly to me – he asked the question “what in your life do you think would be impossible” and then said “when in doubt trust the specialist”. The specialist being God, of course. He went on to say “All things are possible to those who believe”.

I immediately knew I must move forward. The words amazing, overwhelming, awesome and unbelievable struck me then and they strike me now when I think back on it.

That summer afternoon I took a walk by myself on the beach and in order for you to truly get a feeling for how I became aware of this indwelling of the Holy Spirit, I will now share with you a piece that I wrote that day in my journal about that walk on the beach.

“An amazing walk it was. I was alone, with God. No one else was around while I headed for the south bluff. It was so beautiful, the sound of the waves, the sand on my feet and the sight and smell of the water – the beach God knows – is my favorite place to be. I was going over in my mind how awesome my morning had been and had been thanking God for giving me direction and peace.

I reached the south bluff and began my walk back singing in my head the words to the song “my God is an Awesome God.” At that moment I heard something behind me and felt like there was someone there - yet there had been no one around as long as I had been walking. I looked back – and saw my *single* set of foot prints... footprints in the sand... and knew right then that Jesus was with me and that he will carry me through this journey. He will be above me to protect me, in front of me to guide me, behind me to give me the push I need at times, but most of all he will carry me. I then sat down in the sand and thanked our good and gracious lord and I wept.”

This paraclete, Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit, advocate, counselor, comforter, spirit of truth, brings about a new perception of the world that results from the indwelling presence of the risen Jesus. A new ethic arrives when we enter that world. And that new ethic is that we keep Christ's commandments to love God and to love each other. That is what Jesus is talking about when he says if you love me you will keep my commandments.

Jesus assures his disciples and he assures us today that the love in us through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is indeed God's love and Jesus' love and it is a love that discloses to us the truth that God calls each of us to recognize in our neighbor (no matter who that neighbor is) one whom God also loves and calls us to love. The indwelling of the Spirit allows us to know that God's love is not only true – God love is the source of life. In it we live and move and have our being.