

“Will We Move with the Fire and Wind of the Holy Spirit?”

Friends – longtime and new, fellow soul-weary humans still longing and hoping, still growing and stretching, still open to God’s Holy Loving Spirit embodying itself in unique ways through each of our lives, we have gathered on this Pentecost morning to worship God – the fathomless and expansive Love that has created us and is our greatest source of strength and resilience through all that we experience on the journey of life. As we continue in our two-part reflection this morning on our movements with the fire and wind of the Holy Spirit, we acknowledge that this land we now love as People’s Park has been loved by the Wahpekute tribe of the Dakota people and myriad other peoples for millennia before white immigrants stole the land – not as a living, breathing friend that it is, but as something to be possessed. I invite you to please pray with me now.

God of all, help us to sense your presence within and among us now as the apostle Paul reminds us of our truest inheritance and as Jesus reminds us of how very accompanies, equipped and empowered we are to follow his lead. And as we wonder if and how we will move with the fire and wind of your Holy Loving Spirit, O God, grant us the serenity to accept the things that are not within our power to change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Our epistle and gospel readings for this morning remind me of the spectrum of spirituality (that is, ways we connect with and experience God) from apophatic at one extreme to cataphatic on the other extreme. Apophatic spirituality is a way of connecting with God that cannot be described by words and images. Cataphatic spirituality is a way of connecting with God through our human words and images. The apostle offered us this reminder:

“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God... And if we are children, we are heirs as well: heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, sharing in Christ’s suffering and sharing in Christ’s glory.”

God’s Holy Loving Spirit has nudged me toward a new experience of this text in the past week. I have long experienced an under-examined discomfort with the “child of God” metaphor, whether used for Jesus or for any of us. My dis-ease came to a head recently when I found myself responding to an extended family member whom I felt was using the “child of God” metaphor to preference the autonomy of human fetal tissue over the autonomy of a woman to care for her pregnant body. I confessed the following to my family member:

“The ‘child of God’ metaphor has never been particularly compelling for me. I believe that I am dust and to dust I shall return. I believe I am part of God and the dust of Earth is part of God. Although I recognize that Jesus sometimes used the anthropocentric parental (parent/child) metaphor for his own relationship with God and also for his yearnings to care for and nurture others, I know in my bones and in my soul that I am much more than a child of God. For me, our human theological constructs and timelines can’t possibly contain or fully describe our connectedness with the divine/God/Love.”

I was offering a mini manifesto of my leaning toward an apophatic experience of God (indescribable or at least not limited by words and images). Today, as our nation is once again aching from the very concrete, describable reality of mass murders perpetrated by guns too easily acquired and handled, I feel God’s Holy Loving Spirit pulling me toward the cataphatic part of my spirituality, beckoning me to claim my place in the human community as a child of God.

Again, we heard, *“Those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God... And if we are children, we are heirs as well: heirs of God and coheirs with Christ, sharing in Christ’s suffering and sharing in Christ’s glory.”*

Do you recall a time when someone marveled at how you “took after” the behaviors or genetic traits of one of your parents or grandparents or perhaps how you were “just like” an older sibling? As a sibling of Jesus and co-heir of God’s glory, will you follow the Spirit’s lead, acting “just like” your older sibling Jesus and “taking after” a Loving God whose key capacities are to co-create and to suffer with others?

In the gospel reading, Jesus (a very describable historical figure) leads us into our apophatic (indescribable) experience with God’s Holy Loving Spirit. We first heard Philip appeal to Jesus: *“Rabbi, show us Abba God, and that will be enough for us.”*

Then, with Philip, we receive Jesus’ reply, encouraging us to trust that God’s Holy Loving Spirit will manifest Abba God through each of us:

“The truth of the matter is, anyone who has faith in me will do the works I do—and greater works besides... I will ask the One who sent me to give you another Paraclete, another Helper to be with you always—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept since the world neither sees her nor recognizes her; but you can recognize the Spirit because she remains with you and will be within you.”

How can we fully describe the holy loving energy that will empower a person spiraling within a mental health crisis, within a relapse in addiction, or caught in domestic abuse to reach out for and receive compassionate support?

How can we fully describe the holy loving energy that reconnects an adult child and an aging parent, nudging them into brave truth-telling, confession, forgiveness and new life?

How can we fully describe the holy loving energy that will gather people in coming days and weeks to march for the lives of our young people in solidarity with them against gun violence and voicing our urgent need for legislative reform?

How can we fully describe the loving energy that will gather people in coming days and weeks to advocate for women's rights to manage their own bodies and to speak truths about our epidemic of racist ideas and policies that creates food deserts and emboldens acts of racist terror?

We cannot fully describe the essence or workings of God's Holy Loving Spirit, but we know it when we experience it!

Friends, receive Jesus' words of encouragement, offered directly to you. I encourage you to close your eyes now if you are comfortable doing so and hold your hands open as you receive Jesus' blessing:

I will ask the One who sent me to give you another Paraclete, another Helper to be with you always... you can recognize the Spirit because she remains with you and will be within you."

Friends, may we work hard to "take after" Abba God, acting "just like" our older sibling Jesus. And let us be radically open to the Holy Loving Spirit moving as fire and wind through our lives. Love is counting on us. Amen!

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People's Congregational Church (Bayport, MN)
June 5, 2022 (Pentecost Sunday)
Romans 8: 14-17, John 14: 8-17