

## 1-7-24 "The Spirit is With Us"

<sup>4</sup> so John the baptizer appeared<sup>[a]</sup> in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>5</sup> And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. <sup>6</sup> Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. <sup>7</sup> He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. <sup>8</sup> I have baptized you with<sup>[b]</sup> water, but he will baptize you with<sup>[c]</sup> the Holy Spirit."

<sup>9</sup> In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. <sup>10</sup> And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. <sup>11</sup> And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved;<sup>[d]</sup> with you I am well pleased."

Holy Wisdom, Holy Word.

A minister is walking through the jungle when he comes upon a hungry lion.

Just as the lion goes to attack, the minister bows his head and says, "Lord, if you can hear me, please instill the Holy Spirit in this beast's heart."

The lion stops in his tracks as a bright light begins to glow around him. He looks to the sky, folds his paws in prayer, and says, "Thank you, Lord, for this meal."

Like on Pentecost, today's scripture readings have a lot to say about the Spirit, and I pray the Spirit may be guiding this sermon today, because most of the message today is about the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel today tells the story of Jesus' baptism. Who is there at his baptism? God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was also present at everyone's baptism here. Thus, the Holy Spirit is critical to our lives.

Our Old Testament reading also shows us that the Holy Spirit has been active since the beginning of the Earth. Genesis introduces the Holy Spirit by stating that "a wind from God swept over the face of the waters." Wind can also be interpreted as the spirit of God. In Christian interpretation, we see this wind as the spirit of God for it is part of our doctrine of the Trinity, according to scholar David Carr.

The Holy Spirit is a giver of spiritual gifts. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul writes that there are varieties of gifts, but all from the same Spirit. Among the gifts he writes about are, utterance of wisdom, utterance of knowledge, the ability to heal, faith, the working of miracles, prophecy, and speaking in tongues. But if love is not a part of our gifts, then we have nothing, according to Paul. In 1 Cor. 13:13, Paul writes, "And now faith hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love."

We all have gifts of the spirit through our Baptism. Jesus was given gifts too through his baptism from John. Of course, Jesus had more gifts than other humans, he had almost all of them. He had wisdom, knowledge, and he was a healer, he had faith in God, and he could work miracles and he was a prophet. I don't think there is an example of him speaking in tongues, but if anyone could do it, he could have done it.

Since we have been baptized by water and the Holy Spirit, we have spiritual gifts. And all these varieties of gifts are critical to the life of the Body of Christ, the church universal, and the church here at Faith Presbyterian.

These gifts and their use for the church is what we celebrate today in the ordination and installation of our new ruling elders and deacon. They all have different gifts from the Spirit. Wisdom, knowledge, faith. I don't know if any of them can speak in tongues, but if they can, fabulous. And if any of them can interpret those languages, that would be great too. Miracle workers and healers are also very welcome! But wisdom, knowledge, and faith are critical to helping lead our congregation, and that is what they are called to do. They are called to serve the congregation and build on the work that has been done before them, from the beginning of this church in 1984 to their service which starts now.

In a few minutes we will ordain these members of the church to be elders and a deacon. In the prayers for this service, I will pray about how they were anointed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit to share Christ's mission in the world.

"As there were in Old Testament times elders for the government of the people, so the New Testament church provided persons with particular gifts to share in discernment of God's Spirit and governance of God's people. Accordingly, congregations should elect persons of wisdom and maturity of faith, having demonstrated skills in leadership and being compassionate in spirit."<sup>1</sup>

I love the *Book of Order's* description of what the Spirit does for all of us, not just those called to serve in ordained ministry here. The *Book of Order* tells us that "The Spirit gathers us for worship, enlightens us, and equips us through the Word, claims and nourishes us through the Sacraments and sends us out for service."<sup>2</sup>

We all make a decision to come here for worship, the Spirit (or your parents perhaps) moved you here through the Holy Spirit to bring you here to worship. Through the gospel reading and the Old Testament reading, and I hope through the sermon, that the Word can enlighten you and equip you to go out in the world and be the good Christians you can be. Where you are the example being set to the people you encounter about what a good Christian looks like. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are nourished by the blessed elements we consume in that holy meal, a meal that nourishes us to go out as the book says, sending us out to be of service to humanity.

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<sup>1</sup> *Book of Order*, G-2.0301

<sup>2</sup> *Book of Order*, W-1.0105

Today we also observe Epiphany, and I will borrow from a document prepared a few years ago by the worship and music committee when the congregation wasn't worshipping together in person during the pandemic to explain Epiphany. Epiphany is the commemoration of the "manifestation of Christ to the gentiles...in the persons of the Magi." I believe that the Holy Spirit was helping the three "mystical Magi," who were the astrologers, the scientists, and philosophers of their day, along their way to find the Lord in Bethlehem, to follow the star and to find the new king. The document states, they "were called by God to follow a star, find the Christ Child, and worship him." I believe the Holy Spirit was calling them to follow that star, as we are called to follow our star Jesus the Christ, who is the light of the world.

And speaking of stars, today is Star Word Sunday, a tradition that has been going on here a long time at Faith.

I pray that the star Words we receive today inspire us and I pray that the Holy Spirit moves through us to improve our lives and grow our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. I pray the Holy Spirit may come down upon our new elders and our new deacon and inspire them to go out from here to inspire and lead the church.

As the worship and music committee said of the star words in 2021, "it is our hope that Jesus will be revealed more and more in your lives and his Spirit and promises will be made known in you as you contemplate your star word all throughout the year."

We all need inspiration. Where do we get it? In silent meditation and contemplation is where I get a fair amount of it. I believe that the Spirit comes into that silence and sparks ideas and thoughts. We get that inspiration in prayer, either alone, or in the community here at Faith when we worship together. We can pray for the Spirit to come to us and inspire us to be better Christians, to be better followers of Jesus, to love and serve God's children to the best of our ability.

We find that inspiration from the Spirit in Scripture. Our Brief Statement of Faith tells us that the Spirit "engages us through the Word proclaimed." The Spirit feeds us through the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper, and calls women and men to ministry, and "the Spirit gives us courage" as well. We can all use courage. Our new leaders are going to have to find sources of courage as well as they serve the congregation and Christ's church. May the Spirit give them, and all of us, the courage we need to do the will of the Lord and to sustain Christ's church and spread the Good News of Christ's peace to everyone we meet.

Amen.