

“The Holy Spirit: Gift, Helper, Advocate, Peace”

John 14:23-27; Numbers 11:10-17 – Tesa Hauser

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Holy God bless the speaking and the hearing of these words so that we recognize the gift of the Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

I am excited today to talk about one of my favorite topics, persons, and member of the Trinity today, the Holy Spirit. Who is also known as the Spirit of God, spirit, wind, breath of God, the Spirit of Truth, Spirit of Life, and the paraclete, which we will go more into later. Why am I so excited to be talking about the Holy Spirit, you may ask? The Holy Spirit’s ministry continues today and should be talked about more beyond Pentecost.

I was also raised in congregations that often emphasized the work, gifts, and involvement of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This isn’t a dig at mainline denominations or the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of the United States and Canada, the Holy Spirit is mentioned often. I would just like to share more often about the work of, and the gift that is, the Holy Spirit. However, the “lack” of acknowledgement and discussion in some denominations, congregations, and on Sunday mornings makes sense to me.

To start with, the Holy Spirit isn't Jesus, but was with Jesus in his conception in Mary's womb,¹ at his baptism, and throughout his entire ministry². Their main event is at Pentecost and the book of the Acts of the Apostles, which many scholars would aptly say, should be renamed the Acts of the Holy Spirit. But then, it doesn't seem like the Holy Spirit is mentioned or talked about often in the other Epistles or parts of scripture, especially not the emphasis we see in Acts. Which makes sense since the Holy Spirit is Jesus, but is central to ministry and life of Christian, *because* of Jesus which we will see in the John passage. I almost chose the scripture passage Pastor Rebecca used last week in Genesis 1 about creation. The reason is in the first verse we see the Holy Spirit or also known as the Spirit of God hovering over the waters. I think of John 1, which was also used last week, as it call back to that Genesis 1 passage showing that Jesus was from the beginning, and as we see so was the Holy Spirit. Involved in creation and the rest of history from that mention. The Holy Spirit is rarely the main character in the Scriptures, but their impact is great and more so, their ministry continues today as promised by Jesus, as we see in the passage in John.

Chapter 14 of John is part of Jesus' farewell discourse to the disciples. Although, it uses present tense language, farewell discourses were used to provide

¹ Luke 1:35

² Luke 4:14

guidance to those after the departure of said prominent figure. There is a certainty and confidence in Jesus' words, there is knowledge about the events of the future, and about the event of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is talking to his present community, and for those living after Jesus' death and resurrection living in Christian community. The Holy Spirit was already mentioned earlier in the chapter, in verses 15-17. The translation we read uses the word advocate to describe the Holy Spirit but it isn't the full picture. The word used for the Holy Spirit in this chapter is the Greek word "parakletos" which has a wide array of meanings that includes "the one who exhorts," "the one who comforts," "the one who helps," and "the one who makes appeals on one's behalf." In verse 16 the wording is special; Jesus says God will give you "another paraclete" indicating that Jesus is also a paraclete. This paraclete is not new per se but will be a continuation of the work of Jesus, and essentially the work of God, who sent Jesus. The paraclete is keeping Jesus' teachings alive in the post-resurrection community. Chapter 14 also focuses on themes of consolation, assurance, and guidance for the disciple as they prepare for Jesus' departure.

Jesus shares that when they live a life of love, they are keeping Jesus' words, and in turn will experience the love of God. The Holy Spirit will be provided to them so that they can remember Jesus' teachings. The promise of peace does not mean the disciples can be complacent or they won't worry, but to find strength for

the new circumstances they will face once Jesus departs. However, they won't be alone in those difficult moments, they will have the gift of the paraclete, the one who will comfort them, who will help them, who will appeal to God when the going gets tough. In this way, the Holy Spirit is a gift to the believers, it is the peace that allows them keep going through the difficult situations. In Acts, the Holy Spirit is provided and then guides the early Christians in moments of persecution from religious authorities, in learning how to welcome the Gentile Christian community, and in sharing the good news and Jesus/God loves to the rest of the world and whose ministry and work continues today! But let's go back for a second and look at the story in Numbers.

When I came across this passage in Numbers I was surprised. It was not a story that I remembered well. There are plenty stories of the Israelites wandering in the desert that I do remember and I'm sure you have a few that come to mind. This story has echoes of the Pentecost story and shows the work of the Spirit before the Pentecost event. This story in Numbers takes place in the wilderness journey of the first generation of Israelites who were freed from enslavement in Egypt. Chapters 11 to 19 of Numbers are known as the murmuring stories, or episodes of complaint. Understandably so I would say, the Israelites are complaining about their situation, which includes a variety of dangerous and life-threatening situations while in the desert. And understandably so, they are upset about it, and complain to

Moses, and ultimately God, about these situations. There are three major complaints in Exodus, where the Israelites are worried about food and water, and as one commentary I read notes, “Israel's complaints do not indicate their lack of faith in God's leading. Instead, they occur during a period of courtship between God and Israel.” The complaints here in Numbers get a different response from God now that the relationship has already been formed.

A covenant has been made, and so God expects trust and understanding, yet the Israelites continue to distrust God, and complain to Moses once again. Moses is a gifted leader; he is set apart and is filled with the divine Spirit. He can speak face to face to God, is the person who speaks to the people on behalf of God and intercedes on the behalf of the people. However, it isn't easy and that is where we see Moses complain to God to help him out. It is quite a funny complaint, but God responds with the Spirit. God says, “I will provide you with what you need; with the help that you are looking for.”

The spirit of Moses, which was a God given divine spirit, was provided to others so that the labor of leadership could be lifted from Moses, so that he wouldn't have to carry it alone. This story is that of God's collaborative spirit as much as it is about leadership. The Spirit of God is a gift in this story, of collaboration, the Spirit is a helper in Moses' time of need and provides Moses peace about a difficult situation. I would say that it was the spirit on Moses that

allowed him to advocate for himself in that moment to God and receive the help he needed.

The work of the Holy Spirit is life changing, it is a gift, it provides comfort and guidance. Can you see now, why I am so excited about the Holy Spirit?! What if we lived as Christians who remembered that we have the Holy Spirit? What if we welcomed the Holy Spirit daily to help us in becoming a godly parent, child, sibling, disciple, employee? It may mean repentance, that is what belief in Jesus requires, who then in turn gifts us with the Holy Spirit. Turning the other way completely from the path you were on is repentance; it may mean messing with the status quo because it is not the way we should be going. The Holy Spirit reminds us that we are meant to be a gift or blessing to the world with our time, talents, and possessions. The Holy Spirit reminds us that we are supposed to help others, as we have been given help; we are to advocate for others, as we have been advocated for; we are to strive for peace, as we have been given peace.

Many times, the gift of the Holy Spirit is seen only as a personal one. However, as we see in Acts, in John, and in Numbers, the gift of the Holy Spirit is for the community. We sing, “Holy Spirit you are welcome here,” and yet we may only think about Sunday morning, and not the whole life of our congregation. We think about our personal relationships with the Holy Spirit, and not their affect in the relationships we have to friends, family, co-workers, and the community. Do

we think about the Holy Spirit when examining our relationships to those facing housing and food insecurity in our community, those facing violence in their homes, on the borders, in the prison systems, against racial injustice, in our communities? Do we think about the Holy Spirit when we say let us become more like you God/Jesus? Do we think of the Holy Spirit when it is hard to do this ministry in a hurt and broken community and world? Let us say and pray, “Paraclete you are welcome in our homes, in our congregation, in our relationships, and in our ministry in sharing the good news and love of God.” We are not alone in our Christian lives and in our ministry, we have the Holy Spirit. Let us go and do the work with the gift we have been provided. Alleluia and Amen.