

Call to Worship

The Holy Spirit is the gift of God's presence with us and for us in many different dimensions.

All who love Jesus, all who strive to keep God's commandments, all who are open to the Spirit who leads us, join us today to praise, to pray, and to proclaim!

Prayer of Invocation

"Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit, and we shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations, through Christ the Lord, Amen."

The Word Romans 8:22-27 (NRSV)

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.

And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Living the Word

"It's on me! It's on me!" This was a running joke at seminary and you then knew that the Holy Spirit had gotten a hold of someone and made a difference in the previous moments. When we would come from a moving worship service where we felt the Holy Spirit moving in the scriptures, prayers, preaching and music, those were often the times when you heard someone saying "It's on me!"

Of course that was only part of the joke. The way to temper such excitement was to tell the affected one: "I told you not to let it get on you." This alluded to the fact that we were proper United Methodists and don't act up as we leave worship. This may have been poking fun at me, a conservative Scandinavian from Wisconsin, at Seminary in the South, the Bible Belt. We would by then all be laughing.

Maybe the real joke is on us when we fear the Holy Spirit, because we don't recognize it as God working in our lives. Indeed the Holy Spirit is always present with us, but there are times when we feel it more than others. As with Jesus, very often, we do not recognize the Holy Spirit as a gift from God. How many of you often think that the surprise help that comes to you is from the Holy Spirit? How many of you instead say "Wasn't that lucky?"

I have always taught Confirmands that **all** good comes by way of the Holy Spirit (repeat). In I Corinthians 12:3, Saint Paul says: *"Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."*

For John Wesley, May 24, 1738 began as another day of what had become a continuous struggle to believe in all of the things of God. He was a pastor, but his faith was wobbly and he was unsure. The Moravians assured him their personal experiences with the Holy Spirit had been instantaneous. John found himself crying out, "Lord, help my unbelief!" However, he felt dull within and little motivated even to pray for his own salvation.

That evening he reluctantly attended a meeting in Aldersgate. Someone read from Luther's *Preface to the Epistle to Romans*. His journal records "that about 8:45 p.m. while [the reader] was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

Wesley, as we know, went on to be the founder of the Methodist Church. Today, almost 300 years later, we are celebrating Pentecost, the day set aside as a remembrance of the first coming of the Holy Spirit, when the disciples received the Holy Spirit that Christ had promised would come and be an advocate for them in their faith.

Six years ago I attended the Festival of Homiletics – a five day, preaching conference. The speakers are the most relevant and progressive theologians of the protestant denominations in our country. I heard nine sermons and a dozen lectures during the conference. It may not sound too exciting to you, but it was enriching and renewing for me. At each worship service, there was a liturgist who shared the scripture before the preacher appeared. One liturgist walked into worship and said: "Just before worship I was asked if I would read scripture, by my friend, the next preacher. I said, "of course, as long as it isn't Acts 2:1-21." He then paused and said, "Let me read for you Acts 2:1-21."

I will now share with you Acts 2:1-21: When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show [signs] in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

You may guess why the liturgist was reluctant to tackle those names. But his reluctance may also have been that he might get some of the Spirit on him in the reading. In reading this passage we are saying to God "Come, Spirit, Come."

The symbols of the Holy Spirit are the color red (how many wore red today?) to represent the fire that rested on the disciples. It was visibly 'on them;' **another symbol is** the rushing wind, which came to them in sound; and the descending Dove, which came down from heaven when Christ was baptized along with the voice of God.

Matthew 3.16,17: And when Jesus had been baptized, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were opened to him and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased."

The dove is also a symbol of peace. These are just symbols. The Holy Spirit comes to us in many ways, but isn't for the most part seen or heard, but felt within us. Some might say John Wesley had heartburn, (heart strangely warmed – old joke) but he recognized what it was that he felt within him.

Right after Jesus was baptized - the Spirit was with him, and Matthew 4.1 says: Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Interesting that the Holy Spirit led him into temptation, that is something to be pondered and surely a sermon topic for another day...

At the end of Matthew 28.19, Jesus says this to his disciples: Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. They are three together – a Holy Trinity. Even so, we haven't put very much emphasis on the Holy Spirit, yet it is the force that has been given to us to help us along, in this life.

In John 14.16 Jesus says: "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another *Advocate*, to be with you forever." Define advocate – as a noun it is a person who speaks or writes in support or defense of a person, or cause: as in an advocate of peace; or a person who pleads for or on behalf of another; an intercessor.

But the word advocate is also a verb, making it an action word – "to speak or write in favor of; support or urge by argument; recommend publicly. The Holy Spirit as an advocate is here to help us through the good and rough times. It speaks for us and through us when we allow it to be 'on us' and in us.

John 14.26, Jesus says: "But the *Advocate*, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." Jesus the teacher left the disciples and us with another to teach us.

John 15.26, Jesus says: "When the *Advocate* comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf." The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth for us, and helps us share Jesus with others.

Mark 13.11, Jesus tells the disciples and us: "When they bring you to trial and hand you over, do not worry beforehand about what you are to say; but say whatever is given you at that time, for it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit." The Holy Spirit is a gift that gives us the right words to say when we need them. It was a great relief for me when I finally depended on the Spirit for the right words as I entered the hospital to visit someone.

Now, I ask for help as I enter any situation, including writing newspaper articles, the sermons and entering worship...and the words come. If they are good, then we know it was done with the help of the Holy Spirit, the advocate. It is difficult to believe in this solid, reality world that some force we cannot see can be guiding our words.

Have you ever seen a wisp of smoke or cloud floating by? That is how I envision the Holy Spirit; drifting in and out of my life as I ask and allow it to. Of course there are also dark clouds and dark smoke in our lives. There are many scriptures that also speak of unclean spirits and evil spirits. We shouldn't doubt they are present, but when we live within the Holy Spirit, the spirit of truth; when we let it 'get on us', we are shielded from the work of other spirits.

Saint Paul gives to us in today's scripture from his letter to the Romans, a reality picture of how the Holy Spirit will work with us. He begins by acknowledging that in any age the whole creation groans. It had happened before Paul and now 2000 years later creation and all of humanity groans, for we continue to live out of harmony with God.

We are saved by our hope, not falling into the negative traps of other spirits. And as with all spirits, Holy or unclean, they are all unseen. This is where the name 'Holy Ghost' comes from, as it is unseen like a ghost. So we hope and wait and the Holy Spirit will help us in our weakness. We don't know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit sighs for us. The Holy Spirit has the right words for us to speak.

Paul finishes this passage with the connection we have through the Holy Spirit to God. They work together for our benefit. God the Creator, Jesus the teacher/Savior, and The Holy Spirit our advocate: the Triune God, three-in-one.

God and the Holy Spirit work together for our good, in fact for our best. Not always as we think it should be done, because our vision is so limited, and God can see a much bigger picture for us. But there is no reason to fear the Holy Spirit, we just need to acknowledge that when we invite the Spirit, everything can change for us.

We speak of the power of the Holy Spirit, yet we often refuse to see how powerfully the Spirit is working in our lives. Maybe as we look back in retrospect we see more clearly where God had the Spirit working in our lives. I have often wondered how much power God might have for us and even wish for us, that we are too afraid to ask for... Come, Spirit, Come!

Bob has a GPS navigator system that we used when we went to the Lake of the Woods, Canada fishing. He would turn it on when we went out exploring across the waters and it created a line on the graph to show us how we got to where we were so we could find our way back home. We could also look ahead to where we were going, we used it to lead us and guide us. Even so, it could not tell us the best path for our travels.

I believe God knows the destination of each of our choices before we take the first step. As a guide I find that if I have faith enough to ask directions before I step out, the guidance is more reliable.

Each week we have been saying a 'Prayer of Invocation' near the beginning of our worship. Through that prayer we are summoning the Spirit of God to enter into this place, into our worship and into our lives. Often in my prayers, I ask God to 'lead us and guide us.' Doesn't it make sense that we ask the one who Created us to not only go with us, but show us the path to take.

This morning the Prayer of Invocation that we shared is an ancient one, many centuries old, from the early Christian Church. I learned it while on a "Walk to Emmaus" weekend retreat and it has been guiding me in my personal prayers for over 10 years.

"Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of your love. In our lives we want to serve, finding a sense of worth, energized to do something so good that even we are surprised by our abilities. Ask for it. If all good comes through the Holy Spirit, ask for those embers of desire to do go to be fanned into flames again or for the first time.

Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth. God's Spirit can recreate us into something very good.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy your consolations. The Holy Spirit can make us feel and see God's good work in us, bringing a new knowledge of and understanding of our worth to this world in this life.

Through Christ our Lord, Through Jesus' life example and words we can learn about how God's Spirit inspired him to make the right moves giving us our direction and paths for our lives.

Amen." Let it be so...