

Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

Pentecost Sunday: May 28, 2023

The Holy Spirit

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church. Happy Pentecost! Did you notice that our readings today are the alternate Pentecost choice? Since we have heard the story of the disciples gathered speaking the Gospel in various languages from the book of Acts many times, I thought to explore the Holy Spirit from a broader range.

So, to understand the event of Pentecost, we need to understand that this was not the first experience of the Holy Spirit. Our reading from Numbers has people “slain” by the Spirit and prophesying. This is literally the Pentecostal experience back in Moses’ day. But there are some differences between the Holy Spirit of the Old Testament and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. Let’s set the stage for the Old Testament Spirit.

Our reading in Numbers follows the complaint of the Israelites to God of the people being tired of manna and Moses always being in control. Then Moses complains to the Lord and asks God to just, “Kill me now!” so he could escape dealing with this stubborn group of people.

The Lord responds by having Moses appoint 70 elders to help bear the burden. So now the Lord took some of the Spirit that was on Moses and placed it upon these chosen leaders to basically initiate them into God’s service. So here we have the elders prophesying.

The next thing to note though, is that the Spirit's manifestation of prophesying by these elders was only temporary. It was provisional, not on-going.

So, on this day of Pentecost, we have some similarities to the Acts reading in that the disciples are prophesying and the Spirit has taken hold of them. We also see this as another initiation of acceptance and recognition into serving God in a more direct form. And although the Holy Spirit works through faith in both the people of the Old and New Testament, the means of grace that was needed for these events to happen are different.

What was familiar to the Old Testament people was God's Word and the Sacraments. However, the sacraments were Circumcision and the sacrificial system of livestock to the altar or what is referred to as the Passover system.

Today, Pentecost brings in is a new means of grace for God's people. One that is no longer bound to agricultural sacrifice, but instead will form a church on the Word of God through scripture, Baptism and Holy Communion.

At Pentecost the outpouring of the Holy Spirit is not a one-time thing and also not temporary. The Spirit is who empowers the Church and helps us to live and walk by faith.

In the Old Testament the Holy Spirit comes and goes as needed. God's people plead, and the Spirit moves. The famous heroes of scripture such as Sampson could only do great feats of strength when the Spirit was upon them.

What changed was not the Spirit, but our ability to understand and accept the true purpose of the Holy Spirit. Jesus sends not just the Old Testament Spirit but the Comforter. The outpouring of the Spirit from Jesus here today is personal, eternal, and available to all. Most of all, the Holy Spirit after Pentecost will become the inspiration and guidance of God's Church, as flawed as it may be.

There is also one more difference between our Hebrew brothers' and sisters' history of the Holy Spirit, and that which shows up in our Gospel reading for today.

In our Gospel we have Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit into the disciples. What we actually have is Jesus breathing or in the Hebrew tradition placing his "ruach" (literally the breath of God) on the disciples. In today's Gospel we have a rather personal transfer of Spirit. As God took from Moses imbued Spirit, Jesus freely gave his breath - in peace, in comfort, and in person.

We need to remember that during this time in history cultures were changing and intermingling and so were languages. By the time the Holy Spirit comes to those portrayed in the traditional Acts reading we have the

rush of the wind, and in Greek now, we have the “pneuma.” For our Pentecostal party in Acts, we miss the personal.

And as in many other faiths and traditions, there is an unseen guiding force that leads humanity forward and therefore invokes many different names and portrayals.

This leads us to understand that the pull God has us under, the guiding Spirit that inspires us, guides us, leads us, is God, and is an integral part of the Trinity. And you don't have to be extra ordinary to experience the movement of the Spirit in your daily lives. The movement to the music, the quietness of nature, the inspiration to serve others, are all Spirit-motivated to draw you closer to God

By just being here this morning, you have set aside time for the Spirit to lead you, if only for a moment.

I invite you this morning to experience the personal breath of God - the “ruach” - here today. As you are sitting in your seat, relax your shoulders and take a good deep breath in, and allow the Peace of the Lord to fill you.
Amen