

Year C, June 9, 2019
Pentecost (WhitSunday)
Christ Church, Mexia

Today is the day we celebrate receiving the Holy Spirit as reported in the skit based upon the reading from Acts. Hopefully, it gave you some idea of what that event might have been like and how confusing it may have been for those who witnessed it. And it is still confusing today - to understand how the Holy Spirit may work in the world and in our lives, because we can't see the Spirit.

Obviously, the disciples needed to be able to speak other languages in order to spread the gospel message throughout the entire world, and this is yet another signal that God meant for all to be included. Jesus promised several times in scripture that we would not be left alone, including the passages from Romans and John today. In Romans, we are reminded that if we are led by the Spirit, we are children of God. And in John the Spirit is described as our Advocate and the Spirit of truth.

Margaret Thatcher, the former Prime Minister of England, observed that "Ideally when Christians meet as Christians to take counsel together, their purpose is not - or should not be - to ascertain what is in the mind of the majority but what is in the mind of the Holy Spirit - something which may be quite different."

Corrie ten Boom of the Netherlands, who hid Jews from the Nazis during WWII until her family was arrested in February 1944, said, "I have a glove here in my hand. The glove cannot do anything by itself, but when my hand is in it, it can do many things. True, it is not the glove, but my hand in the glove that acts. We are gloves. It is the Holy Spirit in us who is the hand, who does the job. We have to make room for the hand so that every finger is filled."

The questions that arise are now though are: how do we make room for the Holy Spirit, and how can we tell it is really the Holy Spirit at work? Because if the Spirit is like the wind and we don't know from where it comes or where it is going, it can be confusing.

The Holy Spirit is with us but it does not take over our body and impose its will upon us, like is sometime portrayed in horror movies. God does not interfere with our free will, not even to stop us from committing atrocious acts. So, we have to invite the Spirit into our

life, and my experience has been that it must be a sincere invitation, an invitation where we are willing to give control to God. Sadly, this is not easy to do and requires a higher degree of spirituality than most of us usually have.

However, should we want to know whether or not something is the work of the Holy Spirit, - the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, provided three questions to ask in his 1998 sermon on Pentecost Sunday. The first is: "Who does the behavior glorify?" He goes on to say that the Spirit does not glorify the Spirit or the individual, but God. For example, the lights outside the cathedrals/churches that illuminate them at night allow people to see the beauty of the building, but that should be to glorify God. This is like the work of the Spirit. So, if the behavior we feel we are being led to exhibit is to glorify us rather than God, it is not the work of the Spirit.

Secondly, "Does this behavior or this activity build up others besides oneself, or build better community?" In other words, when our commitment is selfish and does not serve others, we should conclude that it is not the work of the Spirit. The Spirit is to help with the reconciliation of all of us to each other and to God. It is not to be divisive; the Spirit works for unity.

The third question asks whether or not this spirituality is fruitful? Jesus told us, it is by their fruit that you shall know them. If the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and so on are not present in community life, Church life or in our personal lives, then we must conclude that the work of the Spirit is being suppressed or ignored rather than followed.

The Archbishop concludes: "Traherne, the great mystic, (reminds) us that the spiritual life is not a rejection of the world around us but a joyful and loving acceptance of its joys and sorrows, its loveliness and ugliness, its loves and its hates. And conversely, only those who are spiritual - who love God - can fully understand and appreciate the world in which God has placed us. So it is that God gives us the eyes to see Christ in others, ..." May we all receive the Holy Spirit, invite the Spirit to control our lives and so inform our decisions that we may know the truth, and be free.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.
Amen.