

Day of Pentecost (RCL/C): But What Does the Holy Spirit **Do**??
Acts 2:1-21; John 14:8-17
June 4-5, 2022
Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

The Holy Spirit has been called the forgotten Person of the Holy Trinity. Why do you think? Jesus, the Second Person of the Trinity, gets the bulk of air time, right, in preaching and in religious education? Since Jesus is often speaking about the Father, the First Person of the Trinity thankfully does get more than passing mention. Scripture usually refers to the Creator and the Savior as Father and Son, so they're usually depicted in art as men. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit (who used to be called the Holy Ghost) has a bit of an image problem, being symbolized as a bird not a human. Now we know the Hebrew and Greek words for "spirit" can also be translated as breath and wind. Breath and wind are invisible, too, though. In the book *The Shack* the Holy Spirit is depicted as a perky Latina woman who floats around in a gauzy gown. Maybe, maybe not, more helpful?

This weekend is Pentecost, the one time in the church year when the Holy Spirit definitely takes center stage. Even if we can't exactly picture this 3rd Person of the Holy Trinity, let's think about what She does. (A spirit is neither male nor female, but the word for spirit in Hebrew and Greek is feminine, so I'm going with "She" as an ok pronoun to refer to the Holy Spirit! ... Besides for which a couple of the Holy Spirit's nicknames are Lifegiver and Comforter, and both giving life and comforting may be considered feminine characteristics, because they're stereotypically associated with females.)

So what does the Holy Spirit **do**? The Book of Genesis says that "in the beginning" She hovers over the waters of chaos, and creation follows. When my life is in disorder, when I feel overwhelmed and don't know where to begin to subdue the chaos and get organized, I like to call upon the Holy Spirit to work a miracle and bring about something resembling order. That prayer

works because once I remember Who's really in charge, and once I realize it's not all up to me, panic recedes, and I can think clearly and act accordingly.

Someone a while ago gave me a Handy Little Chart, subtitled "God has a positive answer." It has 3 columns. The first header is "YOU SAY," the second is "GOD SAYS," and the third is "BIBLE VERSES" that direct us to where God speaks in Scripture. Here are some examples of what we might say when we're overwhelmed and need the Holy Spirit to wing on in:

- You say: "It's impossible." God says: All things are possible. (Luke 18:27)
- You say: "I can't do it." God says: You can do all things. (Philippians 4:13)
- You say: "I'm not able." God says: I am able. (2 Corinthians 9:8)
- You say: "I can't manage." God says: I will supply all your needs. (Philippians 4:19)
- You say: "I'm not smart enough." God says: I give you wisdom. (1 Corinthians 1:30)
- You say: "I can't figure things out." God says: I will direct your steps. (Proverbs 3:5-6)
- You say: "I'm always worried and frustrated." God says: Cast all your cares on ME. (1 Peter 5:7)
- You say: "I'm too tired." God says: I will give you rest. (Matthew 11:28-30)
- You say: "It's not worth it." God says: It will be worth it. (Romans 8:28)
- You say: "I can't forgive myself." God says: I forgive you. (1 John 1:9, Romans 8:1)
- You say: "I can't go on." God says: My grace is sufficient. (2 Corinthians 12:9, Psalm 91:15)
- You say: "I feel all alone." God says: I will never leave you or forsake you. (Hebrews 13:5)

When our fears are calmed, our guilt assuaged, our holy confidence restored, our trust strengthened, our hope renewed, our love deepened, those are sure signs the Holy Spirit is busily at work!

Sometimes the Holy Spirit **orders** the chaos in our lives, but other times She **disorders** what seemed to be working just fine and felt more-than-comfortable, but isn't optimal in God's scheme of things. Sometimes the Holy Spirit **destabilizes** things so they can be rearranged – or cast out and replaced – or removed entirely to clear the stage for whatever God is going to do next. You can probably think of a time when your world went topsy-turvy, not because you were longing for change and prayed for it, but despite the fact that you were pretty **happy** with the status quo and **unhappy** to see it go. Another way to put it: sometimes the Comforter “discomfits” us, and sometimes the Lifegiver brings about endings to prepare us for new beginnings. Physical birth and spiritual rebirth usually involve some level of pain, after all. We shouldn't imagine that the Holy Spirit is tame or domesticated; She can pack quite a punch.

Jesus says, “Behold, I make all things new” (Revelation 21:3), and that probably makes us picture something bright and shiny. In this year's Holy Trinity e-devotion for Easter Sunday (April 17, '22), Linda Murphy quotes Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber, who wrote in her book *Pastrix*:

“New doesn't always look perfect. Like the Easter story itself, new is often messy. New looks like recovering alcoholics. New looks like reconciliation between family members who don't actually deserve it. New looks like every time I manage to admit I was wrong and every time I manage to not mention when I'm right. New looks like every fresh start and every act of forgiveness and every moment of letting go of what we thought we couldn't live without and then somehow living without it anyway. New is the thing we never saw coming – never even hoped for – but ends up being what we needed all along. God simply keeps reaching down into the dirt of humanity and resurrecting us from the graves we dig for ourselves through our violence, our lies, our selfishness, our arrogance and our addictions. And God keeps loving us back to life over and over.”

And **that** is the work of the Holy Spirit. Amen

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