

“Pentecost: The Holy Spirit at Work”

Mary Henderson Bowman

Date: May 19, 2024



When we experience the Divine Trinity, we often have a closer relationship with one or two of the persons and a relationship that is not as developed with the others. The Holy Spirit is often the One who is elusive to us and so today on this Day of Pentecost, when we celebrate the Spirit's coming in a unique way to the followers of Christ, we take the opportunity to focus on the Holy Spirit.

To better understand and to appreciate the Holy Spirit, I want us to begin with Jesus' description in our second reading.¹

Jesus tells the disciples: "I will ask the Father to send another Advocate in my name who will be with you forever."

The Greek word that is used for the Holy Spirit is "Paraclete." In Jesus' day, a Paraclete was "someone who has been called to one's side, especially for the purpose of providing help."²

According to Jesus, the Holy Spirit is a Divine Someone who has been called to come alongside us with the express purpose of being help to us as we live in the world and commune with God.

William Barclay explains in his commentary that there were a variety of reasons that a paraclete was called in to provide help. In the legal system, a paraclete was the one called in to give witness in someone's favor in a lawsuit. In the world of commerce, a paraclete might be an expert called in to give advice in some difficult situation. In the military, a paraclete was called in when a company of soldiers was depressed and dispirited in order to put new courage into their minds. Whenever someone was called in to help in time of trouble or need, that person was referred to as a paraclete.³

And so it is with the Holy Spirit . . . coming to us in need.

Did you happen to notice that Jesus described the Holy Spirit as "another Advocate"?

If the Holy Spirit is a second Paraclete, then who is the first Paraclete?

The answer is Jesus. And it gives an added dimension to Jesus to see Him in this light. In a beautiful way, Jesus Himself was called to the side of humanity for the purpose of providing us help in a world that is broken and vulnerable to evil.

Jesus has always been for us . . . helping us know of God's love and presence and helping with gifts of teaching, healing, guidance, wisdom, encouragement, and the list goes on.

¹ John 14:26

² *Strong's Greek Lexicon*, "paraklētōs," www.blueletterbible.com

³ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John - Volume 2*, 166-167.

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The Holy Spirit and Jesus are both Paracletes and so when we think of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit is a reflection of what we see in Jesus.

It can be challenging to wrap our heads around the Holy Spirit.

We like seeing things, touching things, knowing things.

The Holy Spirit stretches us — I think in good ways — to understand God as Spirit.

We may not be able to see the Holy Spirit, but we can see evidence of the Spirit if we are looking for it.

It is interesting that the Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit” are also the words for breath and for wind.⁴

Breath and wind are remarkably apt metaphors for the Holy Spirit.

We typically cannot see our breath . . . but we can clearly see the effects of our breath.

We can watch the rise and fall of our lungs.

We can blow out a candle.

We can see the wisps of breath on a cold day.

We may not see our breath, but we can see the effects of it.

Similarly, we cannot see the wind.

We watch leaves and scarves, bubbles and balloons all carried on a breeze.

The wind can caress our faces, whip our hair, and topple trees.

The power of the wind is real.

Like our breath and like the wind, the Holy Spirit is also invisible.

But like our breath and like the wind, we can see the Spirit's effects and know that the other Paraclete is powerfully real.

We can see that the Holy Spirit has been called to the side of humanity with the purpose of bringing help.

We see this . . .

. . . in an unexpected change of heart that sends things in a new direction

. . . in the decision to forgive the unforgivable

. . . in a creative idea that comes just at the right time

. . . in the connection we can feel with other people

. . . in the inner healing that can happen, even from unimaginable trauma

. . . and in what others call coincidences — those things that happen unexpectedly but at the perfect time.

⁴ *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, “Holy Spirit,” 391.

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All of these and more, bear the signature of the Holy Spirit.

In Paul’s Letter to the Galatians, Paul describes the fruits of the Spirit . . . they too are evidence of the Spirit being with us.

Unexpected peace in the face of tragedy, perseverance in the face of despair, joy even while hearts are breaking, and the gift of love when we are surrounded by hate and disappointment.

I have an older friend who was recently in the hospital. She was struggling in every way as her elderly body was failing her. In addition to her physical struggles she felt bullied by the staff when she was not able to easily do what they expected. When I visited her in the hospital, she told me about the bullied care and she confessed that she had been ugly right back to the staff. And then she paused and she said, I wanted you to visit because I knew I could be truthful with you and you would call me back to my better self.

This is the Holy Spirit at work. We all have times when the world is hard and ugly to us and all we seem to have is the ability to reflect the ugliness back. But the Holy Spirit through the nudges within us and through others, is always inviting us back to God and back to the way of love, mercy, and justice. This is the change of heart that the Holy Spirit makes possible.

In our first reading, the Apostle Paul called the Holy Spirit’s presence within us “a glorious inner strength” that “does not push us around” but instead “works within us, His Spirit deeply and gently within us.”⁵

This working within us is both for ourselves and for God’s kingdom. And our yes to this work really matters. As Paul says, God will not push us around, but God will come when we say yes to God’s invitation.

Our yes means developing a relationship with the Spirit and making time for God. The Spirit is our guide to how we can live and move and have our being in God. The Spirit is our help in living life fiercely, fully and freely.

We have to make time to quiet ourselves so we can hear and respond. We have to make time for prayer.

So come, Holy Spirit, and help and strengthen us! Amen.

⁵ Ephesians 3:14-21 (The Message)