

## **What Does the Holy Spirit Do? – Acts 1:7-8, Romans 8:15-17 – Aug. 9, 2009**

This morning we continue with part two in our attempt to understand more about the complicated and yet crucial concept of the Holy Spirit. For those of you who were not here last week, we tried to answer the question – who is the Holy Spirit? We noted that the Holy Spirit is none other than God himself; God's living, active, dynamic presence in us and among us; God at work in the world. We talked about how the Holy Spirit is not an "it" or a thing but a "person" – a being that thinks, speaks, acts, has opinions about things and most importantly loves.

We looked briefly at two of the great creeds of the Christian faith – the Apostles and Nicene Creeds and remembered that along with God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son, the Holy Spirit is to be worshipped and proclaimed. And at the very end of the sermon I reminded us all that the Holy Spirit can be either rejected and denied or welcomed and received.

Now this morning we are going to begin to look at what the Holy Spirit does. I say begin because the work of the Holy Spirit is much more multifaceted and involved than I even remember and cannot be covered in one sermon – at least in my humble opinion. But don't fear because beginning in late August, early September we are going to take a close look at what John Wesley – the founder of Methodism - described as three different forms of grace – all of which are completely dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit. But let me give you a little teaser this morning.

Prevenient Grace is the first and it describes how the Holy Spirit draws us close to God even before we know who God is. The second is called Justifying

Grace and is how the Holy Spirit helps us to ultimately say yes to a life lived with Jesus Christ. And the third is called Sanctifying Grace and is how the Holy Spirit helps us to stay on course and live transformed lives of faith and service. Now I know that may all sound very complicated but I promise you it is not and I will do everything I can to present this important work of the Holy Spirit in ways that have meaning for your lives.

But in the meantime I want to look at what is certain to be the most important job of the Holy Spirit which is to empower us to share our faith with other people. The Holy Spirit empowers us for Christian witness. Now I can imagine some of you thinking right off the bat – oh no – not that. You may be thinking that sharing your faith with others is about the last thing you want to have to think about – especially with only a few more days left of summer vacation.

Please believe me when I say I understand. As I have shared on a number of occasions in my first two years with you – I do get the fear and anxiety the concept of witnessing conjures up in many of us. But hear me out because if we could just realize or remember that we are not out there doing this alone – that this is one of the most important jobs of the Holy Spirit – then we might find it a bit easier the next time the opportunity arises. Let me try to explain why.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, Christ continued to be with his disciples for a period of forty days and just before his return to God in heaven he spoke to them the words you heard David read to us this morning from Acts chapter 1. If those words were a bit confusing to you don't worry because quite

likely they were confusing to the disciples as well. Just like many of us, they were still looking for answers, signs, exact dates and times as well as specific directions as to when and what they were to do as his followers. But Jesus couldn't or wouldn't give them what they wanted.

Instead, he gave them the assurance of the Holy Spirit and their primary job description which was to become his witnesses – first right there in Jerusalem, next in Judea and eventually out to Samaria and beyond - even to the remotest parts of the earth. And that is exactly what they did – at least according to Luke – the author of the book of Acts. By Acts chapter eight, the message of Jesus Christ has indeed reached Samaria and by the end of the book Paul is witnessing – telling the story of Jesus in the city of Rome. But here is the best part. They did not have to do it all alone. Just as Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit was with each of them – helping them, showing them, encouraging them to share the message of Jesus Christ with others.

As I mentioned earlier, summer is almost over and the routine of the fall, winter and spring is about to begin. As we prepare to move into these different and relatively more routine seasons of the year, I want to encourage you – no actually I want to challenge you – and myself as well – to take at least one step forward in your faith sharing this coming school year – remembering that faith sharing involves not only our words but our actions as well. One of the things I believe we will discover is that God is going out before us through the work of the Holy Spirit, preparing the hearts and minds of people who will hear what we have

to say. Rev. Jeff Kirby tells a great story of how he experienced firsthand exactly what I am talking about.

It happened to him while in seminary while taking an Old Testament class in which he created a model of the Tabernacle – the portable place of worship used by the Israelites during their time of wandering in the wilderness. Brownie points for anyone who remembers from last week's sermon who created the first Tabernacle with the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit. See me after the service. But back to the story. Rev. Kirby was on his way to class with his model Tabernacle in the back of his car when he decided to pick up a hitch hiker. Yes this was years ago when that was a much safer thing to do. But I digress again.

The two of them talked for a few minutes when suddenly the young man notices the model in the back of the car and asks him what it is. Kirby is not sure how he can explain a tabernacle to a hitch hiker with only a few moments in the car but does the best he can when suddenly the young man gets very excited and asks if it is from the book of Icsa –exa-something. Obviously he cannot pronounce the word Exodus but Kirby is impressed all the same and asks him how he knows that.

He proceeds to tell him that he happened to pick up the bible the night before for the first time and had no idea where to begin so he started thumbing around ended up in the book of Exodus. He read that God lived in a tent and that his last thought before he went to bed that night was if God truly lived in a tent that he wanted to go to that place.

Now many people would just say that was just a coincidence – picking up a guy who just happened to be reading about the tabernacle and you with a model right there in your backseat. But Rev. Kirby didn't think so. He had enough experience with the Holy Spirit and faith in God to realize and remember that God is on a rescue mission. God is still into seeking and saving that which is lost. And the only voices left on earth to speak of God's loving, compassionate, forgiving power and love is yours and mine.

But again we are not alone. The Holy Spirit is there in us and with us and for us – giving us the courage, the strength and at times even the words to share our story – God's story of his love in our lives. And to make it even easier, God is offering us wonderful opportunities here at St. John's to do that very thing. I know because I saw it happen this past week during an amazing Vacation Bible School. I know because I heard it from David just this morning in his wonderful Gideon presentation. And I know because God has led us to offer some exciting events this coming year that give each and every one of us the blessed chance to share with others.

I have no doubt that God is preparing their hearts and minds for us to witness to them so be sure to be here on August 23<sup>rd</sup> for the Ministry Fair to see exactly what I mean and where you can participate. What the Holy Spirit does is empowers us to be his witnesses. Please believe it and live it. Amen.