

What was that?
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The United Church of Broomfield
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John 14:8-17, 25-27 Common English Bible (CEB)

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Creator; that will be enough for us.” Jesus replied, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been with you all this time? Whoever has seen me has seen the Creator. How can you say, ‘Show us the Creator’? Don’t you believe that I am in the Creator and the Creator is in me? The words I have spoken to you I don’t speak on my own. The Creator who dwells in me works. Trust me when I say that I am in the Creator and the Creator is in me, or at least believe on account of the works themselves. I assure you that whoever believes in me will do the works that I do. They will do even greater works than these because I am going to the Creator. I will do whatever you ask for in my name, so that the Creator can be glorified in the Son. When you ask me for anything in my name, I will do it. “If you love me, you will keep my commandments. I will ask the Creator, and she will send another Companion, who will be with you forever. This Companion is the Spirit of Truth, whom the world can’t receive because it neither sees her nor recognizes her. You know her, because she lives with you and will be with you.

“I have spoken these things to you while I am with you. The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Creator will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you. “Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don’t be troubled or afraid.”

In my sermon last week, you may recall that I commented on how our reading from Acts 16 was like a dramatic movie with demon possession, religious conversions, imprisonment and supernatural, violent earthquakes. Well, today is Pentecost. There are several lectionary readings slated for today, but the typical reading read is from Acts – Acts 2:1-21 – and it makes last week’s reading from Acts look like a boring, monotone documentary.

We didn’t read from Acts 2 today, but I know that you’re familiar with it...

- *Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, a gale force – it filled the whole building.*
- *Like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through the ranks of pious Jews gathered from every nation – tongues of fire came to rest on each of them.*
- *They started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.*
- *At the commotion a crowd came running, amazed and thunderstruck at what they saw and heard – these people must be drunk!*

- *Peter said, “No. You are witnessing what was spoken through the prophet Joel who said...*
- *In the last days, God will pour out His spirit upon ALL flesh – when that happens...*
- *Children will prophesy*
- *The young shall see visions*
- *Elders shall dream dreams*
- *...and God will cause wonders in heaven above and earth below – clouds of smoke, a sun of darkness, a moon of blood.*

Now that’s...a scene out of a Hollywood movie! A spirit that is unimaginable and spectacular. For Christians, it’s the birth of the church!

There are many different sides of the Holy Spirit, however, and this is just one of them. She is like a multi-faceted diamond; each side is completely different and sometimes understood only in a moment and in very personal ways.

Today, I want to focus on the less apocalyptic side of the Holy Spirit as presented by Jesus in the Gospel of John.

In each of our lives there are times when we can sense the Spirit of God so clearly that it is palpable — we can almost reach out and touch it. It touches our lives. In moments of great joy, it abounds. In times when we struggle to find comfort and calm, the Spirit of God us strength.

Today’s reading is part of what is known as Jesus’ Farewell Discourse. As the 14th chapter in John’s gospel begins, Jesus tells his disciples that soon he will be leaving them and to not be troubled. Despite all of the time that they’ve had with Jesus and despite all of his preparations with them, they’re still confused. Thomas said, “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” Jesus famously says, “I am the way, the truth and the light.” That’s when Phillip says, “Lord, show us God – **THEN** we will be satisfied.” They’re not understanding him; they’re scared.

As Jesus was preparing to face his death, he made a profound promise to his disciples. He said, “I will not leave you orphaned.” He promises those who had faithfully followed him that he would not abandon them. He would ask God to send them a Spirit of Truth.

But what is the Spirit, Christ gives? How do we understand it? What is it like? How does it work? Jesus gives us images of what this Spirit will be like, but not a clear definition. You and I find it hard to explain what the Holy Spirit is as well. Scholars try to define the Spirit. They use \$100 words and complex theories to try to express it. Some have written thick books just trying to explain what the Holy Spirit is like and how the Spirit functions. All that isn’t helpful to most of us. But in another sense, we don’t need all that information. At some point almost all of us have

sensed the Spirit of God. In a moment of crisis or pain, we have felt God's spirit with us, and we have known we are not alone.

When I was working as a chaplain at Swedish Hospital, I met with a woman who faced surgery, and she was very upset about it. As I talked with her in pre-op, she was visibly anxious about the procedure. We prayed together. When I visited with her after her surgery, she told me of the most wonderful experience. When the staff came to get her for surgery, she was at the height of her fear. But as they wheeled her to the surgical room she suddenly felt comfort, relaxation and calm. She said to me, "I felt God with me in an incredible way. I felt God's arms around me as clearly as any human being's. I knew in that moment that I was going to be okay. My fear suddenly left me."

Not all of us feel God's spirit as clearly as she did, but most of us have had the sense that we are not alone, that God is with us. So, in some sense, we don't need a lot of complex explanations of the Holy Spirit — we know it when we feel it.

When Jesus talked about the coming of the Spirit he seems to have meant that God would come to us in a different form. Jesus of Nazareth was about to leave — his arrest, crucifixion and resurrection were fast approaching. But God was going to send his Spirit to be with those who trusted in him. Jesus would be gone in physical, human form, but he will continue to be present with his followers through the Spirit. God came to us as a human being in Jesus of Nazareth. Everyone could see him, and no one could doubt that he existed; he was there before them in flesh and blood. But now God would come in a different form — as Spirit. No longer would God be present in human form, visible and tangible. When the Spirit came, God's form would be sensed and felt rather than seen.

Today, some will doubt the Spirit's existence since it can't be seen, but everyone is capable of sensing God's presence in their lives. We call out to God for that Spirit all through our lives. "Don't leave us alone; give us your comfort." The comfort of that Spirit is what Christ promised his disciples. He saw the coming tragedy and prepared them for life after he is gone. "I will not leave you orphaned." And the promise Christ made to his original disciples, he also makes to us, his contemporary disciples.

In the gospel of John, the Greek word used for the Spirit is transliterated as *Paraclete*; it means "advocate," "comforter," "champion," "reminder" and "counselor." It is derived from a verb meaning, "to call to one's side." In the Greek legal system, people were allowed to take a *paraclete*/counselor with them to court. The *paraclete* didn't plead their cases for them but stood beside them to influence the court by their moral support for the accused and as

witnesses to their value as citizens. So, in this sense, the *paraclete* was an advocate for another, a comforter in their time of difficulty, their counselor and champion.

What God provides for us in the Holy Spirit is not only one who comforts us, but also one who is at our side, advocating for us in our times of need. When we face times of difficulty the Spirit of God is there for us, and with us. We turn to God in crises, in sorrow and pain, and we are so thankful in those tough times when we are able to sense God's presence in our lives. It gives us strength to go on. God's Spirit isn't just there in times of tragedy and pain, the Spirit celebrates with us in joy as well. We cry out to God in thanks when the doctor reads the test results, and they are good. We can sense the spirit of God when that which has been lost is found. We can feel God's presence when we gather to celebrate a milestone – a birthday or an anniversary.

Sometimes, the Spirit is there *just because*. Over the last three days, I was in Grand Junction, gathered with about 125 fellow clergy and lay leaders for the Rocky Mountain Conference's annual gathering and celebration. This year's theme was, "Embracing the Spirit of Joy and Light." At one point during the event as we were all seated together in a conference hall, we were asked gather in groups of four and to share a moment in our lives in which we felt The Spirit.

< *My experience with The Spirit in 2005 after a job interview* >

Psalm 139 reminds us of the intimate care God has for us...

God, investigate my life;
get all the facts firsthand.
I'm an open book to you;
even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking.
You know when I leave and when I get back;
I'm never out of your sight.
You know everything I'm going to say
before I start the first sentence.
I look behind me and you're there,
then up ahead and you're there, too—
your reassuring presence, coming and going.
This is too much, too wonderful—
I can't take it all in!
Is there any place I can go to avoid your Spirit?
to be out of your sight?
If I climb to the sky, you're there!
If I go underground, you're there!
If I flew on morning's wings
to the far western horizon,

You'd find me in a minute—
you're already there waiting!
Then I said to myself, "Oh, God even sees me in the dark!
At night I'm immersed in the light!"
It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you;
night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you.

When in your life have you felt the presence of God's Spirit? Has the Spirit touched you so clearly that you could feel it like the touch of a friend? Perhaps it was like a rushing wind and flames of fire? Perhaps it was subtler, so subtle that you wondered if it were real? Maybe you only realized that God's Spirit was present afterward, when some time had passed, when you looked back on an experience or a moment.

Jesus said, "...the Holy Spirit will remind you of everything I told you." The Holy Spirit continually reminds us that we are not left as orphans; Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to stand beside us in our need; the advocate, the companion; the counselor. One who reminds us regularly, I am with you. May we be more open to sense the Spirit of God with us and more sensitive to the ways in which God touches our lives, for from the Spirit we receive God's comfort, guidance and joy. AMEN