

So what's an Episcopalian supposed to do with the Holy Spirit? By and large, the Holy Spirit is not our favorite Person in the Holy Trinity. We tend to get God the Father. And the Son we tend to think of in terms of the Incarnation, Jesus of Nazareth. But the Holy Spirit is different somehow; perhaps because unlike fathers and sons, we don't have a ready human analog with which to visualize the Holy Spirit. Too often, the Holy Trinity ends of being, in the words of my theology professor at Sewanee, "Two dudes and a bird." And why "Spirit"? God in general *is* a spirit, why the need for a third Person who is *the* Spirit?

Without getting too deeply into Trinitarian theology – next week is Trinity Sunday and I need to have stuff to talk about – we have the concept of the Third Person of the Holy Trinity because that is what our Lord Jesus told us. In our gospel reading today, our Lord speaks of the Advocate being sent by God to Jesus' followers. *Advocate* is how the NRSV translates the Greek word *Paraclete*. Other translations sometimes use the words *Helper* or *Comforter*. The idea is of someone who enables us to do the things we need to do. This divine helper and advocate was experienced to be God in the same way as the Father and the Son, and so was included in what became the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity. The idea of the Holy Spirit is needed because the Holy Spirit is. We would have made up something simpler if left to our own devices. That's why the other Abrahamic faiths sometimes think we Christians are tri-theistic rather than monotheistic. But we worship one God.

So in John Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, and in Acts we get the rather dramatic story of the Spirit's coming to the disciples. Rushing wind, tongues of fire, speaking in tongues. It's all just a bit much for a Sunday morning. While some Christians are very enthusiastic about the Holy Spirit, we Episcopalians tend to be a bit more reserved. Whether that is a good thing or a bad thing is up for debate, but on the whole, we do not trend towards the charismatic side of the spectrum. We much prefer the way the Spirit is describes in our Epistle reading today. As someone who intercedes for us in prayer with "sighs too deep for words." I love that imagery. God so desires to be in communion with us, that even when we cannot summon the words to pray to God, God prays for us. God makes a way.

But that's what God does, isn't it? Makes a way. Through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, God makes a way for us to be drawn fully into that perfect communion with him. God bridges the gap between Creator and creature by becoming part of that creation, taking on our human nature so that we might begin to take on God's nature. The whole creation groans with labor pains for the birth of new life in God. It is no wonder that words fail us. And when words fail, the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, intercedes for us. The Holy Spirit is not all flames and roaring wind. The Spirit is also sighs and comfort.

In the Creeds, we list the things that are made possible through the Holy Spirit. While each of the three Persons of the Trinity does everything that we think of God doing, we especially see the Holy

Spirit in certain activities. In the Creeds, these are the Prophets, the Church, and baptism. In Scripture, baptism and the Holy Spirit go together. In some cases, people are baptized because they have received the Holy Spirit; in others, the order is reversed. However it happens, the two are intertwined. That is why Pentecost is one of those special days when baptism is particularly appropriate. Even if we weren't actually baptizing someone, we would still join together in renewing our baptismal covenant. But we are baptizing someone. Today Maggie Mae will receive the sacrament of baptism. We will welcome a new sister into the family of God.

While the more flamboyant manifestations of the Holy Spirit may give us pause, we all love a baptism. We are celebrating a new life. Whether one is an infant or an adult, baptism marks the start of a new life in Christ. In a few minutes, I will ask all of you gathered here if you will do all in your power to support Maggie Mae in her life in Christ. And you'll respond with an enthusiastic, "We will." Because we know that we do not live the Christian life in isolation. We are part of one Body, one Family, one Kingdom, one God. We are drawn together and to God through the Holy Spirit. That is why Pentecost and Baptism are such a big deal. They remind us that we part of something much bigger than ourselves. We are part of God. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. *Amen.*