

The Cinderella of the Holy Trinity! Readings: Acts 2:1-21; John 7:37-39 Pentecost/A
By the Rev. Karen Faye Siegfriedt; St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Atascadero CA 5/28/23

Do you remember the story of Cinderella? It is a story of a young girl whose mother died. Her father remarries, bringing a cruel woman into her life. Cinderella is pushed into the background, silenced, and forced to do all the household chores while the others enjoy a life of luxury. That is, until Cinderella is discovered by a fairy godmother who transforms her from rags to beauty, from a forgotten creature into a princess.

Like Cinderella, the recognition and honoring of the Holy Spirit throughout Christian History has been so ignored and understated that I often refer to this Spirit of God as the Cinderella of the Holy Trinity. Just take a look at the creeds as an indication! In the Apostle's Creed, there is a good description about God the Father as the creator of heaven and earth. Then there are several paragraphs about Jesus the Son, describing his origin and time on earth. But when it comes to describing the Holy Spirit, there is only one line: "I believe in the Holy Spirit." Period! Some two hundred years later when the Nicene Creed was adopted, a few more lines were added: "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son, he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets."

There are a few reasons why the theology of the Holy Spirit is underdeveloped and gets little press (unlike Jesus). The Holy Spirit is often seen as a mysterious, intangible force which can make it difficult to define or describe. In later times, enlightenment thinking placed more emphasis on rationality and reason rather than on mystical experiences. Throughout Christian history, denominations have argued, debated, and fought over the role of the Holy Spirit, focusing on doctrine and tradition rather than letting the Spirit lead them. It seems as if religious leaders prefer predictability to radical transformation. Perhaps Christians in general do not really want radical transformation because they are afraid of change. Yet, this Spirit of God, the giver of life, is the very Spirit "who leads us into all truth and enables us to grow into the likeness of Christ" (BCP 852) It is this Holy Spirit who is the subject of today's sermon.

In our gospel reading, Jesus exclaims: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me, drink...[for] out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water." (Jn. 7:37-38) In this passage, he was not addressing physical thirst but rather a spiritual thirst that was to be quenched by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. And yet today in our own nation, we remain in the midst of an epidemic of spiritual thirst and dryness. We are surrounded by dryness, not only physically but spiritually. There is a dryness in people's willingness to face the truth, a dryness in the pursuit of justice for all, a dryness in visioning dreams for an abundant future, a dryness among elected officials who choose to focus on re-election rather than the good of the commonwealth. There is a dryness among people in our communities and churches who are parched in their relationships with others, whether it is because of resentments, ill treatment, or even loneliness. The truth is, at some level we are all thirsty, longing for a drink that will bring more hope and joy into our lives.

Before Jesus departed from his earthly ministry, he promised his disciples that he would not leave them in a spiritual desert. Instead, he would send them an *advocate*, the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of truth...who will teach them everything" and remind them of his words. (Jn. 14,15) This Holy Spirit is described in many ways throughout the New Testament. The Holy Spirit has been referred to as the "Comforter" who comes to dwell within believers and provide them with comfort, guidance, and strength. She is also known as the "Counselor" who guides us into truth and helps us discern right from wrong. This Spirit is an Agent of Transformation who transforms us into a new creation, renewing our minds and empowering us to live according to God's will.

The Holy Spirit also intercedes on behalf of believers in their prayers, helping them to communicate with God and understand God's will. This Spirit teaches believers about God's ways, helping them to understand the truths of Scripture and apply them to their lives. As mentioned in today's reading from Corinthians, the Holy Spirit also distributes spiritual gifts to believers for the common good of the church, including gifts such as wisdom, healing, and knowledge. The Holy Spirit unites believers as one body, creating a diverse yet unified community of faith that reflects the love of God. While Jesus showed us the way, the truth and the life to God, the Holy Spirit gives us the power to live that life. Let me give you a modern-day example of the Holy Spirit at work in the world today. (Following Story from the Washington Post)

Jamie West grew up in Arizona and was put into the state's foster-care system when she was 4 years old because her parents struggled and could not care for her. Over eight years, she was in and out of 94 foster homes — some of which were abusive and neglectful. When she was 12-and-a-half, she climbed out a

bathroom window and ran away. At the age of 16, having lived on the streets with other teens, she walked into a White Castle restaurant and asked for a glass of water. A woman working there said, ‘Oh, Sugar, you poor thing — go get yourself cleaned up in the bathroom.’ Jamie went into the bathroom, cried, and then washed up. When she came out, she couldn’t believe her eyes. She reports: “There were these big sacks filled with slider hamburgers waiting for me. The lady told me they were cleaning the grill and were going to throw everything away and she wanted me to have them...I remember sobbing, then hugging her and grabbing the food and running away.”

This same scenario happened repeatedly at various White Castle restaurants across the country, no matter how rough-looking Jamie was when she walked in. When she was 17, an aunt in Arizona took Jamie into her home for a year. In this more stable environment, her aunt helped her to leave that street mentality and ultimately, she stopped abusing illegal substances. Jamie eventually found a job as a kennel technician at an animal shelter and was able to move out and find a place of her own.

On May 5th of this year, Jamie West married the love of her life at a White Castle Fast food restaurant in Scottsdale Arizona. The wedding was a medieval-theme ceremony that included stacks of sliders for 150 guests, a giant burger-shaped cake and flower girls who threw dehydrated onions instead of flower petals. As she walked up the aisle at her wedding to the music of Journey’s ‘Don’t Stop Believin’, she thought about all of the strangers who helped to feed her and got her to this moment. She said: “I want other girls out there who are going through what I went through to know that it’s going to get better, and they can find hope...I was able to break free of the pain and be happy, and they can too.”

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of love that empowers us to heal, to take risks, and to care about those in need. It was the Holy Spirit working through that woman at White Castle, filling her with compassion for the ragged teenager who needed some food. It was the Holy Spirit who infused other workers at different White Castle establishments with mercy, propelling them to care for hungry patrons. It was the Holy Spirit who motivated the aunt to provide her drug addicted niece with a stable environment. And it was the Holy Spirit who led Jamie to work through her addictions into a well-functioning adult filled with hope. The Holy Spirit is the essential and transformative presence of God in our lives, enabling us to live life more abundantly and to become the people that God created us to be.

And so today, we celebrate the feast of Pentecost, the birthday of the Christian Church, 50 days after Easter. It marks the time in history when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples of Christ in a decisive and profound way, transforming them from a posture of uncertainty and fear, to a place of conviction and courage. Luke tells us: “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” (Acts 2) And while the presence of the Holy Spirit is described like a tornado in this passage, its presence is more often like a gentle Hawaiian breeze, infiltrating our lives as we open to its presence.

Remember Cinderella? The forgotten stepdaughter who was transformed into a beautiful princess? Once we discover, recognize, and embrace the Holy Spirit, we too will be transformed into a beautiful people, people who are evolving into the likeness of Christ. How do we open ourselves up to this transformative power? While we can’t control the Holy Spirit, we can comport our lives in such a way that the Holy Spirit can chip away at our wounded egos, clearing the way to become the people that God created us to be.

One way to become more open is to practice more silence, prayer, and meditation. In order to hear that small still voice within, we need to remove the earbuds, shut off the TV, put aside TikTok, Facebook, and all the distractions of social media. Spending time in quiet reflection allows us to reconnect with God and open ourselves up to the Spirit. Another way to be more open to the workings of the Spirit is through serving others. When we put the needs of others before our own, we become more attuned to the God’s Spirit whether it is through volunteering, donating to charity, or simply showing kindness and compassion to those around us.

There are many spirits out there demanding our attention, seducing us to make choices that are supposed to make us happy. So how do we distinguish the voice of the Holy Spirit from the others? We know the Holy Spirit by its fruit: “Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control.” Come Holy Spirit, come!