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I've always had a little trouble... wrapping my brain around the Holy Spirit. It's the idea of Trinity: that God is *one*—one thing, one *God*—and yet somehow at the same time God's nature is that of three “persons” we can interact with in different ways.

The Christ I can understand. Christ was a person who *existed*, who did and said things that are recorded and accessible to anyone with an internet connection or a library card, and Christ is *more* than that too: fully *divine*—a bridge connecting the humanity He was a part of with the God that He has always been. That last part can get a little confusing, but I've been a Christian long enough to *wrestle* with Christ and try to make sense of His nature in a way that I can make meaning out of.

The Creator I get too. Some people say “the Father;” some people just say “God” and keep it simple. It's that reality of God as transcendent, as above and beyond and around and all-encompassing—the canvas on which the universe was painted, *and* the brush that did the painting. Our heavenly Parent: the one that brought each one of us into being. You could picture an old man with a big beard living above the clouds if you want—I tend not to, partly because every time I *do* I think of a particular scene in “Monty Python and the Holy Grail” and I can't keep a straight face; kinda messes with my prayer-life. Or you might picture the stars in the sky as the *eyes* of the Creator, far above and looking down on *us*, we who were birthed of stardust aeons ago. It's the Creator who created us—who continues to create anew every day—and it's *to* the Creator we'll *return* when we're released from these mortal meat-suits.

The Holy Spirit, on the other hand...

I think part of the reason there *is* a Trinity is so that the different parts of *us* can relate to God in different *ways*. And the *brain* just isn't the part *for* the Holy Spirit. For that we have to go deeper.

The first of our Scripture readings for today tells a bit of the Pentecost story that churches across the world tell every year. Some time after Christ had ascended to heaven, the apostles were gathered for a harvest festival, when all of a sudden

the promise Christ had left them with came *true*. The Spirit of God flew into their bodies and filled them with new energy, and empowered them to be understood by all the people who had come for the festival from cultures across the known world.

The words of the physician Luke: “That day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.”

That’s the day we remember on Pentecost Sunday. The day the church was born. The day the work that we as Christians do here in York, Maine *began*.

Sure, Pentecost didn’t take place in York, it took place in Jerusalem two thousand years ago. But it was the day that the Holy Spirit first descended upon the followers of Christ and empowered them to walk the way of God. To do the work of God. To live the *life* of God. We are here now, in this building that exists today, because the Spirit of God spread from *twelve* into those three thousand lives and beyond, and lit their hearts on fire. Because God’s active power filled every cell of their bodies and made them capable of miracles in this world.

Sometimes it’s a wind that blows through us. Sometimes it’s an energy that fills us up. Call it gasoline, or an electrical charge, or a roaring fire, or refreshing water—it is all of those things. And it’s something more. With the power of the Holy Spirit at our disposal we can change *lives*. It inspires us to new heights... and it gives us the ability to achieve them.

That’s the story we usually talk about on Pentecost Sunday. That’s the work of the Holy Spirit that we *focus* on. That the Holy Spirit is Christ’s tool for turning *us* into *God’s* tools. That somehow, when we need it most, we can breathe in the transformative power of God and have the ability, the wisdom, and the courage to do God’s work.

Every time in this church that I tell you to go forth and do God’s work in this world, and every time Reverend Estelle charges you to *be* the light and bring heaven to Earth, it’s the Holy Spirit that makes it possible for you to *do* all that, just as it empowered those first few believers to turn the counter-cultural, unknown teachings of a counter-cultural unknown man from a backwater town in a

backwater region of a backwater protectorate... into one of the most influential movements in all of human history.

And that's *mostly* what I *talk* about when I talk about the Holy Spirit. Because I can actually *quantify* that a little bit. The benefit of being a pastor is that *all the time* you experience first-hand the Holy Spirit empowering you to do things you couldn't *do* on your own. I deal with that on a regular basis. Don't misunderstand, that doesn't make *me*—or pastors in *general*—any more *special* than anyone else... it really just means that I *tend to put* myself into a lot of *situations* where... *I* wouldn't be *able* to do what needs to be done if *God* didn't jump in to *help* me. Which a younger me would have said was reckless or irresponsible, but which *I* prefer to call "having faith."

On Pentecost we remember that just as the Holy Spirit swooped in to empower the apostles two-thousand years ago to do incredible things in the name of Christ, and to do the work of God... it swoops into *us* as well—modern, 21st Century Christians with cell phones and opinions about patio furniture—and it can empower even *us* to do truly wonderful things, in this world that *needs* more people *doing* wonderful things. Acts of love, of compassion, of liberation and healing.

What we *don't* talk about on Pentecost Sunday that often... is all those times that we *don't* feel the Holy Spirit swooping in. Those times that... sometimes feel like the *norm*, rather than the exception. The days when nothing works the way we want it to. The days when we feel alone and unloved. The days when we're suffering, or lost. The days when we might *want* to do God's work but *can't*... *and* the days when we *can't* see *any* way that we could be of *any* use to God.

On those days the Holy Spirit feels as far away as somebody sitting on the clouds miles above our heads. And it's those days that the apostle Paul writes about in chapter 8 of his letter to the Romans. He talks about the days when we aren't empowered to do *anything*, and all there is for us to *do* is to somehow *endure* all the things that're getting heaped *onto* us.

And yet, even in that, Paul talks about the *Holy Spirit*. Because the Spirit isn't *just* God's tool-belt for humanity, and it isn't *just* God's energy drink for a person who has work to do.

It *is* both of those things... but it's *more* than that. And it's this element of the Holy Spirit that operates in our *hearts* that makes it so hard for me as a *head-Christian* to wrap my brain around it.

What good is the presence of God when we can't *feel* it? What do we *do* when the Holy Spirit *doesn't* swoop into our lives?

There's an odd saying I heard when I was a kid that goes like this: "If you immediately know the candlelight is fire, the meal was cooked a long time ago." It's one of those sort of Zen-like sayings that doesn't quite make sense but forces you to open your mind to a bigger truth. Kind of like the Holy Spirit—hard to make sense of but urging us to open our minds to a bigger truth.

To help you understand what I'm getting at, let me tell you a story. It's an *old* story that's not *mine*, about a man who comes home to his cabin in the evening after a long day of work. He walks up the forest path, with only his paraffin lantern to guide his way. He gets to the cabin and lets himself in to the cold, dark building. By the dim light of the lantern, he looks hard to try to find his matches so that he can start the fire and cook dinner. He looks in his closet, opening the doors and peering inside, holding up the lantern to light the way. But they aren't there. He goes into the firewood box, using the lantern to light the inside, but the matches aren't there either. All he sees are the shadows of the logs flickering on the wall. He goes outside to the latrine—maybe he left the matches there when he smoked his pipe yesterday? But they aren't there either. He looks in his drawers, his coat, his cloak, and all the boxes or pouches he can find in his dark cabin, using the lantern to light the way. But the matches are nowhere to be found. Hungry, frustrated, and tired, the man goes to sleep, not looking forward to his early start and long hours tomorrow at work.

Did you notice what he missed? If he stopped and thought about it... his candlelight—the *lantern*—could have been used to start the stove instead of the matches he couldn't find. If he had *recognized* the *lantern* light he was using as *fire*, his dinner would have been cooked *much* earlier, and he would have been *satisfied* when he went to sleep, and woken up fresh for work tomorrow.

"Because it is so clear, it takes a long time to realize it. If you immediately know the candlelight is fire, the meal was cooked a long time ago."

We all have days when we can't feel the presence of God. When it feels like God's Spirit has left us, whether we've pushed it *out* or something's gotten in the way or God just doesn't have time for us or *interest* in us. Days when we're alone. Days when the wind *doesn't* come from heaven as it did on Pentecost and *fill* us with the Holy Spirit. Days when we can't *find* the Holy Spirit no matter how hard we *look* for it.

Is something wrong with *us*, we ask? Is something wrong with *God*?

No. Because the Holy Spirit never *left*. It's among you now, and it always *has* been, even when you couldn't feel it. It's the only reason we *survive* those terrible days! Those days of suffering, of loss, of directionlessness and struggle. The reason we can *make* it to the next day at *all* is because the Holy Spirit is standing up for us, and holding our hands and filling our lungs, propping us up, and keeping our souls intact even when the universe batters our bodies.

Sometimes we can't *see* God's hand in our lives; sometimes we can't *feel* God's presence in our hearts... but that *doesn't* mean that God has *abandoned* us.

The Creator and the Christ were marked down in our holy book thousands of years ago; it's why they're so easy to point to and make sense of. But the Holy Spirit wasn't just recorded in the Bible, it lives *within* you and is at work every single day—*that's* why it's so hard to wrap our heads around. Because its story isn't over—it's still unfolding. And you're a part of that story!

You don't have to search high and low for the matches when the fire is in your hand. The lost sunglasses have been sitting on top of your head the whole time. The power to fly was inside you all along, Dumbo.

It's the journey of a lifetime to *recognize* the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives. But I *promise* you it is there, now, working within you, every second of every day. Transforming you and filling you with God's own power.

How can I promise you that? How do I *know* that the Holy Spirit is within you and never left?

Because I am convinced, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor *anything* else in *all* creation, will *ever* be able to separate you from the love of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.