

Read During Announcements:

As I reworked the liturgy this week I kept thinking about how one of the tasks of the Holy Spirit is that the Spirit comes to us from the Father's presence to testify about the truth of Jesus Christ. (John 15.26-27)

So our liturgy begins in the holy presence of God where God thunders and causes the cedars to break and the desert to shake. The only human sound is a simple, single, clear voice, gently singing praise to God. But soon, we begin also to hear spots of silence. Places where the Holy Spirit is whispering. During those times of silence, we're to listen for the Spirit.

Then the liturgy necessarily moves into confession because no human being may witness the Holy God and not fall on his or her knees in confession. And even as we offer our prayers of confession we know that they are inadequate so that clear voice pleadingly sings to the Holy Spirit to pray for us before the throne of God. After which we're reassured that the Spirit truly does intercede for us through wordless groans before the very throne of God that we encountered in the beginning of the liturgy.

Akron Christian Reformed Church

Harry Winters

June 4, 2017 Pentecost Sunday

John 7.37-39; 1 Corinthians 12.1-11; Psalm ; John 20.19-23

The Quiet Spirit

Prayer: Ahh, quiet Spirit, testify to our spirits about the truth and glory of Jesus Christ as the Word is proclaimed this morning. We need your help to even hear this Word during this time, because we arrive here filled with noise. Voices from our past and from our present incessantly buzz within us, distracting us from your gentle word. Calm our hearts and minds. Assist us at being still in your presence. Testify to us. Intercede on the behalf of the Father with us. In your Holy Name we pray. Amen.

In Acts 2, the first Pentecost is filled with great commotion. There's powerful sounds. Profound images. Miraculous speaking, or perhaps, miraculous hearing. There's the roaring of the mighty wind. The tongues of fire. The people who cry out, "they're all drunk." And there are the others who are cut to their hearts and who fall to the ground in repentance and conversion.

Now, for many people, for many churches, the wild excitement of Acts 2 has become their dominant way of imagining the work and presence of the Holy Spirit. Some will tell you unless there's this great Spiritual raucousness in your life, where you're slain in the Spirit, and speak in tongues, and crow like roosters, you haven't experienced the Holy Spirit. But, such theology is not accurate.

As I've said many times, even though we aren't charismatically raucous around here, we are nonetheless charismatic Christians. In fact, we can't be Christians without being charismatic.

We're not the wild, spiritually overcharged kind of Christians. We're keyed much lower than that. Indeed, we're even keyed below the rhythmically hand clapping Christians. We don't even have that spiritual gift.

Nonetheless, the Holy Spirit is with us in subtle, in gentle, in quiet ways. We possess the Holy Spirit or we wouldn't be here. The Holy Spirit has come to us or we wouldn't believe in Jesus. And even our children experience the Holy Spirit as they mature into being baptized and as they reaffirm their baptismal covenant. The Holy Spirit fills us or we wouldn't know the truth that sets us free – Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit empowers us or we wouldn't possess so many charisms. (*Charisms* is Greek for "gifts".)

As I said, we are charismatic Christians. All that means is that we are people who already possess all of the charisms, or, the gifts that the Holy Spirit offers. But our gifts are subtly displayed and used, and because of this subtly they seem natural to us, so that we don't generally identify them as originating in the Spirit.

We do have among us, people who speak in tongues. And we do have among us people who see visions. But they're quiet about such gifts.

However, we have many more among us who are given the gift of teaching, and the gift of healing, and the gift of creating, and the gift of engineering, and the gift of encouraging, and the gift of feeding, and the gift of generosity, and the gift of administration, and the gift of thinking and analyzing. We have an abundance of Spiritual charisms, or gifts, within our community.

We're overflowing with gifts that are poured out upon us by the Holy Spirit. But there was so very little drama as these gifts developed within us. Indeed, there was often just a lot of disciplined, hard work, as we learned how to use the gifts that the Holy Spirit gave to us. It took years, often decades of hard work to develop the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given to each one of us. For most of us that meant long years of education. We're a nerdy bunch. And some of us learned to develop our Spiritual gifts simply by being around and watching our parents, or some other generous adult. Few of us have experienced the giving of instantaneous gifts that need very little development or hard work.

And so we often feel insecure and inferior to the wild and rowdy Christians whose gifts have very little subtlety about them and seem to appear quite effortlessly. We feel inadequate. And there are plenty of Christians who want to make us feel inadequate.

But don't feel inadequate. (The truth is such instantaneous gifts are inferior gifts.) The gifts of the Spirit that we have here in this congregation are amazing and powerful and beautiful and deep with meaning. They are all that we need. Hand clapping isn't exactly all that great of a gift.

Another Pentecostal truth is that the Holy Spirit dwells within us all of the time. The Holy Spirit is continuously testifying to our spirit about the truth of Jesus Christ and the Father. The Spirit continuously whispers to us about the glory of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is always whispering God's great love into us to counterbalance Legion's loud assaults on our psyches.

And I've become convinced that it is helpful to our faith when we slow down, when we quiet down, when we become still in the presence of the Lord, so that we may begin to recognize and hear the voice of the Holy Spirit speaking truth to our spirit.

Today we will witness the Holy Spirit at work in three of our children. And make no mistake about it, they will stand before us, professing their faith, because of the work of the Holy Spirit. Sam will be baptized, Leya and Macy will reaffirm their baptismal covenant, because the Spirit has been whispering God's love into their ears for years; while they've been led in the Young Children and Worship program, taught in Sunday School, participated in worship up here, celebrated the Lord's Supper, and were blessed. They have been experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives Sunday after Sunday, since they were babies, for many years now. They have experienced the long-term work of the Holy Spirit. And today is just another step in that work.

Ah well, there you have it. We're again at the beginning of Pentecost. I pray that it will be a quiet and powerful time where we experience the presence and hear the gentle whisper of the Holy Spirit. I pray that our eyes will be opened to the presence of God as we watch these three children and as we eat and drink with the Lord.

In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.