

“The Holy Fire” - Acts 2.1-4 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

The Rev. Adam Hamilton, who wrote the sermon series and book *Creed*, believes this is the “most understated line in the Apostles’ Creed.” When you first read it after reading about all it says about Jesus in the preceding paragraph, it is a “one liner” that really doesn’t say anything about the Holy Spirit, just belief in it. But he goes on to point out that the Holy Spirit has already been mentioned in the previous statement about Jesus being, “*Conceived by the Holy Spirit.*” And he therefore implies that all that is said about Jesus in the creed is possible because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Who is the Holy Spirit? In both Hebrew and Greek, the same word is used for spirit, breath and wind. In Hebrew it is “ruach” in Greek “pneuma,” from which we get the word pneumonia. So, in the book of Genesis when we read of the wind blowing over the waters at creation, we can also read of the spirit blowing over the waters depending on the particular translator. The spirit is holy because it comes from God. As Christians we believe the Holy Spirit is a part of the triune God as I shared last week our understanding of one God in three persons or manifestations classically known as the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.

What does the Holy Spirit do? It empowers people. There is a key difference between the Old and New Testaments’ understanding of the workings of the Spirit. In the Old Testament the Spirit of God would come upon leaders or upon people who empowered by the Spirit became leaders. These would have been the judges, kings, or prophets who not only received the Spirit but also the Word of God to speak to the people of God. The Spirit would come upon a select few and then through them and what they did or said, it would trickle down to the people. In the New Testament we have two images of the Holy Spirit. It descends on Jesus at his baptism like a dove and then it descends upon the apostles like tongues of fire in Acts 2 that we heard this morning. It tells the story of the birth of the church when the Holy Spirit came down upon the apostles. The Holy Spirit now comes upon all people (we will hear more about this seven-weeks after Easter when we celebrate the Day of Pentecost.)

Why does the Holy Spirit matter? It empowers each of us, and the whole church. It enables us to grow what the Apostle Paul called the Fruit of the Spirit. *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.* (Galatians 5.22-23) I believe we each need to grow more of the fruit individually and collectively as a church. Hamilton believes many people are leading Spirit-deficient lives. He writes about his own experience as a teenager in the Pentecostal movement within the church and the primary evidence of the presence of the Holy Spirit expressed there was people “speaking in tongues.” Many people in that movement of the church in the last century were described as “being on fire!” Have you ever experienced this happening at a worship service or a revival? Today pray for all of the half-dead churches that the Holy Spirit might catch the people on fire!

Besides the Fruit of the Spirit, Paul also wrote of the Manifestations of the Spirit. *A demonstration of the Spirit is given to each person for the common good. A word of wisdom is given by the Spirit to one person, a word of knowledge to another according to the same Spirit, faith to still another by the same Spirit, gifts of healing to another in the one Spirit, performance of miracles to another, prophecy to another, the ability to tell spirits apart to another, different kinds of tongues to another, and the interpretation of the tongues to another.*

All these things are produced by the one and same Spirit who gives what he wants to each person. (1 Corinthians 12.7-11)

I think about the Holy Spirit as the Holy Breath of God. Jesus actually breathes the Spirit on the disciples in John's Gospel, *Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."* (John 20.22) If you remember the creation story of Adam, God breathed life into him after he created him from the ground. With that Holy Breath then we can see how believers receive new life in Christ. We can be filled with the Spirit. But we can also be depleted. And some see the reason for coming to church or joining a small group is to come back and get filled up again for the week ahead like going to the gas station or maybe the air pump to inflate the tires if they begin to go flat. So where are you today empowered by the Spirit or running on empty as Hamilton described it - Spirit-deficient lives?

As we think of writing our own creeds, here is my portion for this week, ***I believe in the Holy Spirit, the life-giving breath and power of God calling us to grow and become what we were created to be.*** If we listen to the Spirit, might it nudge us to do something or say something like the people we read about in the Bible. Hamilton encourages us to listen for the Spirit's call. Commit to listen more fully for the Spirit's voice and to help the Spirit's work in the world.

Do you know about breath prayers? Breath prayers are a way to become more aware of God's Breath. Believing that the Holy Spirit is as near as the air we breathe, a breath prayer is softly or silently repeating a single-line prayer with each breath. As you exhale address God with something like the classical "Jesus Prayer", "Jesus, Son of God. have mercy on me, a sinner." Other examples are, "Creator God, allow me to see your beauty," "Holy Spirit, let me feel your joy," "O Lord, show me your way," or "Holy One, heal me." Repeat the prayer with each breath for several minutes. Listen for God's Spirit to speak to you. Where do you see evidence of the Spirit breathing new life into your life, and into the life of the church? Believe it. Breathe it. Alleluia and Amen.