

Study Guide May 20, 2018

Readings: Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:25-37; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Theme: Pentecost and the Holy Spirit

While the Four Gospels tell the story of Jesus, the Book of Acts tells the story of the Christian Church. Author Barbara Brown Taylor sees Acts as “the book of the Holy Spirit” for it is here, on the day of Pentecost, that God breathed new life and purpose upon those who had gathered with the Apostles. The Church (the Body of Christ) and the Holy Spirit cannot be separated because they both are One with God. It’s through the Spirit given to us by Jesus Christ that we too become a part of God. To be a church is not to be a building, but a people who build others up to be more like Christ.

In this week’s message I state the Holy Spirit is God breathing God’s breath into us, so God can be close and intimate with us in times when we are unable to be that way with ourselves or with others. The Holy Spirit is a gift from God, a gift that must be shared. Just as we inhale God’s breath and spirit so too must we exhale God’s breath and spirit of love, peace, kindness, patience, and justice back into the world.

In Genesis, God breathed creation into existence. In the womb of Mary, God breathed the life of Jesus into existence. Today, God gives us his powerful breath to constantly give birth to a new creation...the Church. How we define “church” should be no different than how we define the Spirit... by our acts of love, kindness, and mercy.

Read: Acts 2:1-21

The story of Pentecost is this. At 9 o’clock in the morning, the disciples gather, and the place where they meet is filled with a rush of wind and tongues of fire, and they speak in tongues that all can understand. “Before any of them could defend themselves,” Taylor says, “that mighty wind had blown through the entire house, striking sparks that burst into flames above their heads, and they were filled up with it, everyone of them was filled to the gills with God’s breath.” Those believers “sucked in God’s breath” and were transformed by it. “Shy people had become bold, scared people had become gutsy, and lost people had found a sure sense of direction.”¹ Even Peter, the bumbling denier of Christ, turns into a powerful preacher. The story of Pentecost is a reminder of who we are as a church, what we are called to proclaim, and how to be that source of proclamation in the world.

Q: What might Pentecost look like today? What language might it cause you to speak or testify God’s grace and love to others?

Q: How is the Holy Spirit moving you to proclaim and testify to God’s love through Jesus Christ?

Prayer: Come, O Holy Spirit, come. And fill me with your presence today so I might testify with the same intensity and boldness as the saints before me. Amen.

Read: Romans 8:22-27

Paul portrays a quieter Holy Spirit than that of the Pentecost story in Acts. Here we see a Holy Spirit that helps us by being a kindly supporter and intercessor on our behalf. That gives us courage and hope. The Holy Spirit from Paul's perspective is indeed the presence of God among us. You might say it's a fresh pair of legs to lift us up, straighten us out, and empowers us ordinary people to do the most extraordinary things.

Q: What do you make of the different portrayals of the Holy Spirit in today's readings?

Q: In what ways has the Holy Spirit awoken in you a sense of calling, or sharing the good news of God's redemption and restoration that comes to us through Christ?

Prayer: Blessed Spirit of God, to you my advocate and intercessor I offer the prayers of my heart and prayers for those in my life who need you now more than ever. Amen.

Read: John 15:26-16:15

In the Gospel, we find yet another lens through which we can see the Holy Spirit. Here we *encounter the Holy Spirit as advocate and guide*—an advocate that will testify on behalf of Jesus to the world and that will guide his disciples into truths they are not yet ready to bear. Jesus tells his disciples that it is to their advantage that he has to leave them, because only then will the Advocate come to them. To this passage Brendan Manning shares:

"Over a hundred years ago in the Deep South, a phrase so common in our Christian culture today, "born again," was seldom or never used. Rather, the phrase used to describe the breakthrough into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ was "I was seized by the power of a great affection." These words described both the initiative of God and the explosion within the heart when Jesus, instead of being a face on a holy card with long hair and a robe with many folds, became real, alive, and Lord of one's personal and professional life. Seized by the power of a great affection was a visceral description of the phenomenon of Pentecost, authentic conversion, and the release of the Holy Spirit. The phrase lent new meaning to the old Russian proverb, "Those who have the disease called Jesus will never be cured." [2]

Q: How might you understand the Holy Spirit as "the Spirit of truth"—as contrasted, perhaps, with the fiery flames of Acts or the sighing intercessor of Romans?

Q: In what ways has the Holy Spirit spoken truths upon your heart in this passage?

Prayer: Dear God, I need you present in my life now more than ever. Send me your Holy Spirit to guide me in the direction of your truth so I might show others the Way. Amen.

Slow Read Psalm 104:25-37: As you read and reread this psalm, breath in the Spirit and Breath of God and let it bless your soul.

[1] Taylor, Barbara Brown. Home By Another Way. Kindle Edition.

[2] Manning, Brennan. The Ragamuffin Gospel: Good News for the Bedraggled, Beat-Up, and Burnt Out. Kindle Edition.