

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Thunder Bay

207 South Brodie St. <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca>

First Sunday after the Epiphany - January 10, 2021

Words of Welcome

Talk of the Holy Spirit is often a big turn off for people who are believers and non-believer alike. So here I am, going to talk about the Holy Spirit, but hopefully in a way that doesn't make you tune out and maybe even brings a little clarity to the conversation.

Call to Worship

Water. Refreshing, cleansing, nourishing, life-giving . . .

Water. Dangerous, life-threatening, powerful . . .

The waters rush over us in our baptism.

And we are filled with the Holy Spirit. Alleluia!

<https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/entry/2213/worship-elements-january-10-2021>

Hymn

Like the murmur of the dove's song

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1. Like the murmur of the dove's song,
like the challenge of her flight,
like the vigour of the wind's rush,
like the new flame's eager might:
come, Holy Spirit, come.

2. To the members of Christ's body,
to the branches of the Vine,
to the church in faith assembled,
to her midst as gift and sign:
come, Holy Spirit, come.

3. With the healing of division
with the ceaseless voice of prayer,
with the power to love and witness,
with the peace beyond compare:
come, Holy Spirit, come.

Words by Carl P. Daw, Jr., © Words: 1982 Hope Publishing Company

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Prayers of Adoration and Confession

Lord of Hope we give You thanks for a new day.

We arise today to a horizon guiding our eye beyond the everyday;

to a dawn gently lighting up the wonders of Your creation;

to a whispered dew rooting us firmly to this precious earth.

For this and more we thank You.

Lord of Hope we give You thanks for a new year.

We arise today to the knowledge that Your Son, our Lord, goes before us;

to the hope that through His presence all people will be transformed;

to the promise of salvation for all. For this and more we thank You.

Lord of Hope we give You thanks for a new start.
We arise today turning our backs on the ways of judgement and criticism;
sloughing off narrow-minded assumptions;
reaching out to enemy and friend with generous compassionate hearts.
For the promise of a new start, a new year, a new day,
for these gifts and for so much more we thank You.

www.churchofscotland.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/72451/10-January-1-Sunday-after-Epiphany.pdf

God of majesty and mercy, forgive our wrongdoing:
things we have done knowingly...
things we have left undone...
hurts we have inflicted unintentionally...
and hurts we have tried to disguise.

Forgive our acts of selfishness,
harmful things we have done to please others,
and those done to please ourselves.

In the week ahead and the year ahead, help us choose a better way.

As we come to the scriptures, O God, to hear your Word for us, we pray that your Spirit will stir our imaginations, add to our insight, and challenge our assumptions, for the sake of Jesus Christ, your Living Word. Amen.

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Assurance of Pardon

Friends, hear the good news!
Through we are unworthy; we are granted God's favor in Jesus Christ
and are baptized into the church of his beloved Son.
Friends, believe the good news!
In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven.

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Scripture Readings

❖ Mark 1:1-11

¹The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

²As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,

“See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,
who will prepare your way;

³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.’”

⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, “The one

who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

^b

❖ Acts 19:1-7

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. ²He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” ³Then he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.” ⁴Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” ⁵On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied— ⁷altogether there were about twelve of them.

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The word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Message Whaaaat? There’s a Holy Spirit?!

‘Whatcha talkin bout Willis?’ I will be dating myself, but saying those words will bring back memories to a certain generation. That tagline is taken from the television series *Different Strokes* as by said Garry Coleman AKA Arnold. I think I just waited for that line in every episode. It was one of a few taglines that came to mind as I read about Paul in Ephesus when he came upon some disciples, and decided he would do a check in about their experience thus far as followers of Jesus. “He said to them, ‘Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?’” (Acts 19:2 NRSV)

Simple but important question. We are not told what led Paul to ask this. It could be that it was his first question whenever he met people that he understood to be disciples. He may have just been checking out the landscape and what kind of teaching was needed yet. Our scriptures say that the response to Paul was “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” If we used less formal language one might hear “Whatcha talkin about Paul?” or Whaaaaat? There’s a Holy Spirit?!

For some people the hardest part of the Christian faith to get their minds wrapped around is an understanding of the Holy Spirit. They can imagine God the Father, well because at the most basic level, we all have a father. They get Jesus the Son, mostly because

we have four gospels that tell us stories of Jesus life. But the Holy Spirit, well, it feels unexplainable, it doesn't get the same headlines.

One helpful explanation of the Holy Spirit that I have read comes from a book edited by Rolf Jacobson. There you find the following,

The Holy Spirit is the active presence of God in Creation. It is the drumbeat that lays down the rhythm that provides the drive for the music, the dance, and the lyrics. Since it's also called the Holy Ghost, the Spirit often gets sidelined as being too strange, elusive, or creepy for regular conversation and use. Therefore, the Spirit often is forgotten by Christians or is left for those weirdo believers who tend to put their hands in the air during worship or scream unintelligible. But really, the Spirit is simply the active presence of God here and now and for all eternity, but apparently that's hard to grasp...the Spirit is like the musical score of a movie – you don't notice it unless it's not there.¹

The active presence of God. The Holy Spirit is the one thing that is present for believers in Jesus. It has always been, is, and continues beyond our living. If you want to see God at work in your life and in the life of others looks for the movement of the Holy Spirit.

Let's get back to Paul for a moment. Paul said to the disciples he had caught up with in Ephesus, "John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is in Jesus." (v4) Then he proceeded to baptise them in the name of the Lord Jesus and "the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied." (v6)

This may be where we get that sense that the Holy Spirit is only with those who can speak in tongues or prophesy, but that would be limiting the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are mentioned in this moment but. in other letters written by Paul, we learn of other gifts of the Spirit. In Romans, Paul writes about the gifts of teaching, giving, leading, compassion, and cheerfulness. (Romans 12:6-8)

The point is that to be Christians baptized into the faith is to know that the Holy Spirit is part of the deal. Without the work and presence of the Holy Spirit we lose out on all that the Christian faith offers in transforming our lives. Beyond that, the Holy Spirit has the power to transform the Christian Church, organizations, communities, and so much more.

Once again, let's get back to Paul's original question in the moment, but instead of seeing it only in this telling, hear it as a question for you. "Did you receive the Holy Spirit

¹ Jacobson, Rolf A. Editor. *Crazy Talk – A Not-So-Stuffey Dictionary of Theological Terms*. Augsburg Books. Minneapolis. 2008. P86-87.

when you became believers?” Now if you are like me, you were baptized as an infant so any memory of that moment is lost to me, but that does not mean that the Holy Spirit was not present at our baptism. In fact, our parents and church families were counting on the Holy Spirit being the active presence of God in that moment that would be with us throughout our lives.

It is as true for infants as it is for those who are baptised as young adults or as seniors. It doesn't really matter how it's done, even if Christians like to think they have all the answers, dipping, sprinkling, to full immersion, the Bible isn't to stuck on this as much as it IS stuck on the fact that it has everything to do with what God is up to.

Baptism is the moment in which we or our parents on our behalf say, “We believe in God, in the forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, and power of the Holy Spirit to be the active and transforming presence of God in our lives.

So how do you know if you received the Holy Spirit when you became believers? You trust it. Each of us today who is baptised, was baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Anyone who would choose to be baptised in the Christian Church today is baptised in the name of Jesus. It does not matter whether you are baptized Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican, Lutheran, in a United Church, or Baptist to name only a few different streams of Christian followers. If you are baptised in the name of Jesus you have received the Holy Spirit.

The task becomes recognizing the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Again, you can be very young to very old and be able to discern the work and presence of the Holy Spirit. It takes viewing the world through the lens of faith, trusting that God is present and active in every moment, even when at first it may seem like there is only hopelessness, despair, and frustration. It is a practiced faith that asks, “Where is God in this?” And being willing to look at situations and people with an open heart and mind.

I have to admit, the work of the Holy Spirit as the active presence of God in the world is one of my favorite conversations. It is in these conversations that one gets to the heart of people. It is intimate conversation at a depth that we rarely get to over coffee. Many either have not experienced or not recognized the work and presence of the Holy Spirit in their lives or they don't want to admit to it. Even if people are willing to have the conversation, it often is difficult to find the language to speak about it. Still, it is worth the effort, it is worth being vulnerable enough to share our experiences and our understandings of the Holy.

Further more, let me encourage you to trust in your baptism or inquire about baptism. It is a moment in our faith and life that can reverberate throughout our entire lives. I think of the drumbeat of the indigenous peoples and how powerful and important it is to them, how it resonates for me. Let the Holy Spirit become “the drumbeat that lays down the

rhythm that provides the drive for the music, the dance, and the lyrics”² of your life. Watch and actively participate with the Holy Spirit in transforming yourself, and to see where it leads you and the church in the world. In Christ, with Christ, and through Christ. Amen.

Closing Prayer

God of Grace, you call us to pray with open and hopeful hearts.
Trusting in you, we join together in prayer for ourselves and our world.

We thank you for the work of your church
and for all we are able to do to bring your love, healing and justice into the world.
We pray for churches that are struggling financially,
for churches enmeshed in conflict,
for those that are tired and in need of renewal;
and for congregations that have found a new sense of purpose.
Give them all wisdom and strength.

We thank you for the healing we have known in our lives:
for the experience of being forgiven;
for reconciliation and mended relationships;
for comfort in times of grief;
for pain eased and recovery from illness.
As the pandemic still haunts lives and nations,
we pray for those struggling with COVID-19 and its lingering effects,
for those whose emotions are raw from fear or isolation,
and for those exhausted by caring for others and serving the public day by day.
Give each one the hope and courage they need to face this new year.

We pray for our brothers and sisters across the world
who are striving for unity in places of division;
for justice in the face of oppression;
for peace where violence has broken out;
and for daily bread in the midst of poverty and famine.
Give them hope and courage to face this new year.

Strengthen us to serve you not only with our words, but with our actions.
Help us to see others with your eyes,
and reach out with your compassion, especially where differences divide.
Teach us how to work together and show what it means to follow you.

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And now we pray in the words that Jesus taught:

² Ibid.

Lord's Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and forever. Amen.

Invitation to make an offering

In the season of Epiphany, God's gift to us in Christ is revealed to the world. Our gifts to God in Christ's name reveal our commitment to the love and mercy, the forgiveness and hope we have received.

May our generosity mirror our trust in God.

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If you would like to make a donation toward the life and ministry of St. Andrew's Presbyterian in Thunder Bay visit our website at <http://standrewspres-tbay.ca> for more information.

Hymn

Breath on me, breath of God

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| 1. Breathe on me, breath of God;
fill me with life anew,
that I may love what thou dost love
and do what thou wouldst do. | 2. Breathe on me, breath of God,
until my heart is pure,
until with thee I will one will
to do and to endure. |
| 3. Breathe on me, breath of God,
till I am wholly thine,
until this earthly part of me
glows with thy fire divine. | 4. Breathe on me, breath of God,
so shall I never die,
but live with thee the perfect life
of thine eternity. |

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Benediction

Go into the world as God's beloved children,
to share the gift of grace which flows from God's heart.

Go into the world as baptized sisters and brothers of Jesus,
to bring the light of hope to all in despair.

Go into the world as those filled with the Holy Spirit,
to hear the whispered yearnings for peace and reconciliation.

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