

Sermon, Pentecost Sunday, Youth Sunday

Emily Dallas

June 12, 2011

If God were an octopus, the Holy Spirit would be his tentacles. Hold that thought.

Could you choose a more difficult day of which to tell the story? Pentecost? Really? Easter, it would be pretty simple. Christmas, I know it like the back of my hand. Pentecost? A bunch of people were sitting in a room together, and all of the sudden their heads caught on fire and the wind blew really hard and they started speaking different languages but could still understand each other? They obviously weren't drunk, it was only 9 in the morning. Could the Holy Spirit have come in a more questionable way? Maybe it is this mysterious way that the Holy Spirit works that keeps us from realizing its importance in our lives as Presbyterians. We affirm our faith in a Triune God when we say the Apostles Creed, but the only things we say about the Holy Ghost are that Jesus was conceived by it and that we believe in it. However, the Holy Spirit holds a much more significant position in our lives than we may realize. First of all, when we pray, most of the time, aren't we praying for the Holy Spirit to guide us? While praying for the sick, we pray the Holy Spirit brings them strength and hope. When we pray for diseases to be cured, are we not simply praying for some doctor, somewhere to be guided to spend an extra hour in the lab one night and develop a cure? When we pray for a deceased loved one, aren't we praying that the Holy Spirit delivers them to Heaven and brings those of us on Earth enough faith and comfort to get through a hard time? When we lift up our joys, don't we show the Lord that we are thankful for the Holy Spirit coming into our lives and making us appreciate our surroundings and situation? There you go, the octopus makes sense now, doesn't it? If God were an Octopus, the Holy Spirit would be his tentacles, the parts that are effective, that make it recognizable. Without tentacles, would we recognize the Octopus? Without the Holy Spirit, would we recognize God in our daily lives?

Another important aspect of the Holy Spirit is the spirit in each of us that guides us and affects others. Perhaps this is where the wind and fire in the Pentecost story can have a more comprehensible meaning. Fire is one of the key symbols for the Holy Spirit, first of all because this is one of the ways it appeared on Pentecost but it is also a good symbol for the Holy Spirit in each of us. Fire can easily be spread without anyone losing their original fire, like lighting candles in a room, everyone gets a flame, but the original candle bearers still have the same size flame. Similarly, we can share our spirit with others just like a flame. Doing good deeds, spreading cheer, showing people you care, using your talents to help others, these are all perfect ways to spread the flame of the Holy Spirit inside yourself. When we consider the Holy Spirit, we also often use the wind as a symbol.

Traditionally, people use this symbol because on Pentecost, the wind filled the room where all of the people were meeting and because it is something we feel, but cannot see. Similarly to flame, wind can be used as a metaphor to help us understand the Holy Spirit in other ways. Everyone knows that while running, biking, sailing, or doing a variety of other activities, it is easier to have the wind at your back. Like the wind, the Holy Spirit can influence us by guiding us in one way or another and sometimes the wind is at our back, but sometimes it would be easier to go a different direction. Part of the importance of the Holy Spirit is showing us new ways to do the things we've always done. Maybe unexpected challenges come up in our lives to encourage us to accept changes and most of the time even appreciate them (unless it means slicing the Strawberry Festival Strawberries instead of quartering them, that is just out of the question)! Maybe the wind isn't always at our backs and sometimes it is hard to find the flame inside of us, but it is important for us to know when to dig deeper to find our spirit and maybe even change our routes.

Since today is not only Pentecost, but also Confirmation day, I would like to conclude with some advice for this year's confirmands. First of all, Confirmation isn't significant because it is the end of your time as a child in

the church, it is important because it is the beginning of your life as an adult in the church. With that said, it important for you to realize that getting confirmed isn't your free pass to stop coming to church, it is a summons to come to church more often and pay more attention and gain a deeper understanding of your own faith. I was confirmed four years ago and in the past four years, I have learned more about myself and my faith than I ever learned in Sunday School or confirmation. Being an adult member of the church also means that you should take what you learn in church into other parts of your life. By now, you know what it means to live a Christian life and once you are confirmed, it becomes your own responsibility to be the kind of person you know you should be. Being an adult member of the church also means you have responsibilities within the church to make it the best it can be in the present and for the future. After all, you are not taking this church from your parents, you are borrowing it from you grandchildren. God gave each of you many talents and interests and I am sure there are ways you can use them to improve the church and your community, and now that you are an adult in the church, it is your obligation to do so. Lastly, it is important to realize that as a member of the church, you are a member of a community. The people here will do anything to help you and you should be willing to do the same for anyone in the church. Remember, the story of Pentecost begins "They were all together in one place".

Amen.

© Emily Dallas, 2011