

Isaiah 6:1-8
Romans 8:12-17
John 3:1-17
Psalm 29

The Reverend Laura Palmer
Church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields
May 26th, 2024
Trinity Sunday Year B

Shall we Dance?

Accept the offering of our lives, O God; we do not know quite what to do with them. We place them before Thee as they are, encumbered and fragmented, with no hints, no suggestions, no attempts to order the working of Thy Spirit upon us. Accept our lives, our Father—work them over. Correct them. Purify them. Hold them in Thy focus lest we perish and the spirit within us dies.¹ Amen

Mystic and theologian Howard Thurman's prayer points to vitality as the pulsing heartbeat of the Holy Spirit. It's a gift given to us that's easier to embrace than explain or understand. We celebrate and sing "God in three persons, blessed Trinity." Father, Son, and Holy Ghost and skate right by the enormity of what we've been given.

Once could preach a theologically sound sermon on Trinity Sunday in just 16 words: "If God were small enough to be understood he wouldn't be big enough to be worshiped." Amen.

Evelyn Underhill's words say in effect, "Mystery is the explanation of mystery." Maybe one day we will see face-to-face but for now we don't and we can't.

The genius of the Trinity is that it affirms that God is calling us to relationship. Richard Rohr describes this as "the divine dance" an invitation to be who God is calling us to be. If something keeps making more of you, there's a good bet it's the Holy Spirit. Curiosity, intuition, synchronicity, can be handmaidens of the Holy Spirit and so can certainty: that deep inner soul knowingness that tells you "I have to be a teacher, a surgeon, a ballet dancer.

For me the Spirit has always led me to a place beyond imagining where I knew I belonged the moment I arrived. When I look back on my life as an author, journalist, chaplain, and priest, I can see

¹Thurman, Howard, "The Light of His Spirit, *The Inward Journey*" Friends United Press, 11/1/2007

the turning points when something unexpected happened that pointed the way: a chance encounter led to Vietnam, a book title bubbled up on Amtrak, an Easter brunch suggestion led to seminary, well, you get the idea. My relentless curiosity pushes me through doors when they open.

While the Holy Spirit got my attention and sent my life in a new direction there was plenty of work for me to do to realize the gifts I'd been given.

There's a big difference between mystery and magic. The mystery of the Holy Spirit can feel impenetrable: How does 1+1+1 equal 1? But when the Spirit moves in an individual life it's often immediately understandable. Last Saturday, at Sue and Al's wedding, a self-described "ardent atheist" said he wasn't sure if it was the Holy Spirit but he felt something powerful moving during the service.

This is some of what Jesus is explaining to Nicodemus in their nighttime rendezvous. It wasn't safe for Nicodemus to be seen with Jesus in daylight. He was a member of the Jewish religious elite who knew only a monotheistic religion. Nicodemus didn't get it. How can a mortal like Jesus have divine powers?

Jesus replied to him with the poetic mystery of the Holy Spirit: "The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Jesus is saying that his power is from God bestowed on him by the Holy Spirit as his baptism in the river Jordan attests.

God's dependence on us as co-creators is there from the beginning. What if Mary had said "No" to the Angel Gabriel? She didn't step outside her comfort zone, she bolted from it. "Jesus was incarnated by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary" as we say thousands of times in our lives—and yet are too blinded to the breath of God in our own. God depended on Mary to bring his son into the world. Ever since Jesus's ascension, he's been depending on us.

And the choice is always ours. Many resist the urge to grow, clinging to the sidelines of life and remaining wallflowers at the "Divine Dance." This is how the spirit—the breath of God-- dies within us. How we slam the door on God and the spirit dies within us.

What turns the key is *trust*. Trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit. Trusting in the goodness of God. The people closest to me thought I was crazy to go to seminary. It seemed expensive and pointless, especially when I said I was sure I'd never be ordained. So, yes, the laugh's on me. But I did trust

wholeheartedly with that inner knowingness that seminary would lead me where I was meant to go. I just had no idea what it would be.

Christianity is steeped in paradox. Writes Fr. Richard Rohr:

To enter into relationship with the risen Christ, we have to let go of ourselves, surrender control of our lives, and let the Spirit be given to us. We think that we might lose our individuality, yet surrendering to God actually increases it.

For once in our lives, we're truly free to become ourselves rather than what others want us to be. The highest form of self-possession is the capacity to give ourselves away. By giving ourselves completely to God, we come to be possessed by God and in full possession of ourselves at the same time.

The Spirit is elusive, blowing where it wills. Yet like fire, the Spirit can be felt. The Spirit is experienced as the warmth of God's love. And like blood, it is experienced as an inner vitality. The Spirit is supremely intimate, yet supremely transcendent.²

And it calls upon us to act, to realize God's kingdom on this earth. To stand up for truth. For justice. For equality and peace.

But never underestimate the power of the Holy Spirit.

In Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s unforgettable "I Have a Dream Speech," the last seven minutes were totally unscripted. King departed from his prepared text with words that came through him. The 250,000 people on the mall in Washington had never heard anything like it.

As King stepped away from the podium, Ralph Abernathy embraced him and told him that the Holy Spirit had taken hold of him during the speech. King himself didn't quite know what to make of what had happened: The 'I have a dream' refrain just came to him he said, 'just all of a sudden.'³

Invite the Holy Spirit into your life except the truth is the spirit is already there. Better yet, perhaps the invitation should be to help open your heart to receive the gifts that are on your doorstep, waiting to be received. AMEN.

² Rohr, Richard Fr., Daily (Online) Meditation, Center for Action and Contemplation, May 20th, 2024

³ Hansen Drew D., *The Dream: Martin Luther King and the Speech that Inspired a Nation*, Harper Collins, October 13th, 2009, p. 164