



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

Many Names

John 14:16–17, 25–26

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Once upon a time there was a little girl named Mary who couldn't wait to go to school, on the school bus with a lunch bucket and a plaid backpack, just like her big sister. Soon—it happened. Much to her delight, before long, Mary was old enough to go to kindergarten. She liked it a lot but she was surprised that sometimes she missed her mommy and her daddy and her stuffed bunny, Peaches, and it made her sad. She tried to be brave, especially when she felt homesick.

One day, all of the parents were invited to come to the kindergarten class and bring a lunch to share with their child. Mary's daddy came with a special lunch, with all of Mary's favorite things. And they even had two Dove chocolates each, as an after lunch treat. Mary felt safe and happy with her daddy, sitting right there, next to her.

And then it was time for the parents to leave. The children gave their parents a kiss and ran to the playground while the parents went to their cars to go back to work or home or wherever parents go when kids are in school!

Mary saw her daddy get in the car and begin to pull away. And she stood at the edge of the playground, waving at her daddy and quietly whispering, Goodbye, Daddy! Goodbye, Daddy! Daddy pulled out and began to drive down the road, and he could see Mary in his rearview mirror, waving and he could read her lips, Goodbye, Daddy! Goodbye, Daddy! It brought a tear to his eye as he watched his baby girl get smaller and smaller in the distance behind him.

And I wonder if the disciples and Jesus, who loved each other to the end, maybe felt what Mary and her daddy were feeling at that playground. Feeling alone can be a profoundly difficult thing to experience. And this is what the disciples are likely to have feared most: isolation from their teacher and friend. All they had done, was about being part of Jesus' life and journey. Followers of the way.

And now, Jesus was about to leave his disciples. On several occasions he had been preparing them—it's not like he had

2 kept them in the dark. But knowing that he would soon be leaving and comprehending the implications of what that would mean for them personally, were probably two different things. They had left their lives, everything, behind—and devoted themselves to Jesus. They lived together 24/7, he had been right there next to them—to show them the way.

And maybe even more unsettling, on another level, they had come to know Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, in the person of Jesus himself. God Incarnate—the Word made flesh. Perhaps, to them, Jesus’ death meant the end of God’s revelations—the end of their new relationship with God, their new hope for the future, their new life.

And Jesus, with great patience, with great love for his imperfect but beloved friends, reassures them. Anxiety, fear and troubled hearts are much on Jesus’ mind. Hear these words again from Jesus’ “Farewell Discourse” as recorded in the Gospel of John:

¹⁵“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

²⁵“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

Jesus promises that someone...the Holy Spirit...will be with them. And they don’t need to be afraid.

The spirit was nothing new...it is found throughout scripture. The Bible is full of stories about the Spirit's life and creative power. In the Hebrew scriptures, or the Old Testament, three major emphases can be identified, the first of which is the Holy Spirit as an agent in creation, found in the second verse of the Bible. *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters"* (Genesis 1:1–2). The Hebrew word here for Spirit is *ruach*, literally meaning breath or wind. Through God's breathing, chaos became cosmos—an orderly universe.

A second is the Holy Spirit, or *ruach*, as a source of inspiration and power. Israel's leaders—from Moses to Joshua, from the judges to David and Solomon, to the mysterious "Servant of God" Isaiah 42—all received their wisdom, courage, and power as gifts from God's spirit. And the inspiration of the prophets, who, because they embodied this God-breathed Spirit, speak and act with an authority and power not their own.

A third emphasis in the Hebrew scriptures is the Holy Spirit as God's presence in the covenantal community, as we see in the New Testament as well.

In the New Testament, the Holy spirit, here translated from the Greek word "pneuma" also meaning breath or wind, has a more diverse range of meaning. The Spirit is found in nearly every book of the New Testament, with a variety of descriptions. We read of the tongues of fire as in Acts 2 or a freely blowing breeze, as in John 3.

The scripture passage found in John 14, in Jesus' farewell to his friends, gives a very helpful picture of the Holy Spirit. Jesus calls the spirit Advocate, translated from the Greek, *paraclete*, (not to be confused with this guy—although it makes a great mnemonic device). *Paraclete* means to come alongside and to walk with. The Spirit is sent in Jesus' name and reminds us of what he taught and how he lived. In a very real way, the Spirit mediates Jesus' presence and helps to keep his promise that he

4

will not leave his disciples and us, orphaned. They are assured, as are we, that we won't be left alone and lonely, standing at the edge of the playground.

For the most part, we can understand God as Creator. And we can recognize Jesus as God Incarnate, because we have so many stories that help us to know and understand Jesus. But I think there are times that it can be kind of difficult for us to wrap our minds around the Holy Spirit.

Several years ago I served on our District Ministry Commission. Each month we interviewed candidates for ministry from throughout the district—both licensed and those seeking ordination. One month we interviewed ...a very gifted, creative and playful young minister-in-training. One of the interview questions asked him to share his explanation of the trinity—how do you view God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. He had pretty much textbook answers until he came to the Holy Spirit. He said something like, “Well, in my mind’s eye, I imagine the Holy Spirit to be someone like...Tinkerbell.” You might imagine the expressions on a few of the normally reserved and austere faces around that table. It was clear that Tinkerbell was not the theological answer the commission was looking for. But for me, this was an intriguing thought. Sometimes playful, capricious, full of surprises...maybe that is the Holy Spirit. If we are truly made in God’s image, and we believe we are, God must have a fun-loving, playful side.

Last week I was in the 20's & 30's Somethings Class and asked if I could kind of pick their brains. I was curious about what they think of the Holy Spirit. So I asked them, “When have you experienced the Holy Spirit in a very real way?”

Here are some of their reflections—I asked their permission to share their responses with you. They said that they have experienced the Holy Spirit...

- ...while in nature.
- ...when traveling—especially alone, when they can take in the overwhelming enormity of God’s creation.

- ...in what the Celts call “thin places” — those occasions when the veil between heaven and earth becomes permeable and God is palpable.
- ...when they have an acute sense of continuity with generations that have come before... that great cloud of witnesses.
- ...during a mountain top experience, like National Youth Conference.
- ...or after a sacred campfire at the end of a week at camp, when it seems that all is just right with the world.

I was touched and inspired as we shared our Holy Spirit moments.

Returning to our scripture for this morning... Jesus’ impending death presents a real crisis for the disciples. Jesus addresses their fears, preparing the community for life after his death. Those who love Jesus will not abandon that new life after Jesus’ death. They are assured that the God who loves the world this much will not abandon them. Jesus did not leave them alone. And he does not leave us alone either.

In the original Greek, the “you” in Jesus’ farewell is plural. The gift of the Holy Spirit comes not only to individuals, but to the believing community. The experience of the Holy Spirit is not just something that is a private, personal experience but is centered in community.¹ The Holy Spirit will be given to those who live out their love for Jesus through their love for one another. The gift of the Holy Spirit marks the beginning of a new era in which the community of faith becomes the primary expression of God’s love and faithfulness. We call that the Body of Christ as we continue the work of Jesus. And as we share our Holy Spirit moments with one another, just as the 20’s & 30’s Somethings class did, we can appreciate others more fully and we perhaps even become ourselves more fully.

¹*Heart, Soul and Mind: Becoming a Member of the Church of the Brethren* by Rhonda Pittman Gingrich. Brethren Press, 2000.

6 Author and Catholic priest Richard Rohr writes that during a hermitage stay, he felt compelled to compose a prayer litany, imagining many names and movements of the Spirit—to awaken and strengthen the presence within us.

I'd like to read the litany²—I invite you to listen to the names Rohr has given to Holy Spirit moments. Perhaps you have experienced one of these moments. Or perhaps one of these moments stirs a desire to be open and aware to a new expression of the Holy Spirit.

Pure Gift of God

Implanted Hope

Indwelling Presence

Seething Desire

Promise of God

Fire of Life and Love

Pledge and Guarantee

Truth Speaker

Defense Attorney

Flowing Stream

Inner Anointing

Wind of Change

Homing Device

Descending Dove

Stable Witness

Cloud of Unknowing

Peacemaker

Filled Emptiness

Always Already Awareness

Deepest Level of Our Longing

Compassionate Observer

Sacred Wounding

God Compass

Holy Healing

Inner Breath

Will of God

Mutual Yearning

Great Compassion

Hidden Love of God

Holy Spirit, who prays in us, through us, with us, for us, and in spite of us. Amen, Alleluia!

²Center for Action and Contemplation, Richard Rohr Meditation: *Indwelling Spirit: Weekly Summary*, May 25, 2019.

