

Rev. Sarah Carver

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Before moving here to the Greenville area, we had purchased a home that needed some love... some paint as they say (and, frankly, a whole lot more as well). So, I spent months prior to moving learning about white paint because I was planning on updating the interior of the house with some version of white. Now, if you are a designer, or artist, or decorator, what I'm going to say is not profound. But if you're a novice like me, you might find this interesting. White is not the simple, unsophisticated color I thought it was. It is so much more than the oft ignored white crayon in the box. For what is one going to do with the color white other than draw snow or angels? While these are perfectly good, the choices are limited. Yet, outside of the crayon box there is nothing simple about the color white. You cannot, say, paint the walls of your house white because in reality, there is no such thing. Instead there are seemingly an infinite number of whites set apart by their undertones... those colors that reside in the background that cause the color "white" to lean yellow, pink, grey or blue or even green. The amount of light a room gets also influences how strong the undertones will show with full sunlight causing white with warm undertones to appear rather yellow when that same color, in cool, indirect light will appear as a soft pure white, saved from appearing too stark because of those same warm undertones. To capture the affect you are seeking, you have to pay more attention to the color that lies beneath and let that guide you as you seek to select just the right shade. It is easy to assume a lot about plain old boring white. But if we pay attention, we learn that we can assume nothing. That it is not the color white we see, but what is behind it that colors everything.

The Holy Spirit is that person of the trinity who can often be forgotten. Tucked away in pockets of scripture here and there, it is not often we encounter her, and we never hear her speaking as one hears Jesus speaking to his followers. Yet, she is always there. From the beginning God's spirit moved over the deep as creation was being brought forth, she spoke through the prophets of God through the ages, she exists in the very breath of life, she offers those who love God new birth. And in our gospels for the last few weeks, we hear how Jesus tell us how the Spirit will continue her work in her coming to the disciples unseen, yet abiding with them just as Christ did, advocating for them, dwelling within them. We know that on the day of Pentecost, which is fast approaching, that it was the Spirit's presence among Jesus's friends that pulled them from out of the safe shadows of gloomy rooms, and into the daylight where all could see them and all could hear the story of God's salvation.

We see this story beginning here in our first reading today, where the promise of the Spirit is given, that just before he ascends to heaven Jesus promises the Spirit to his disciples and how they will receive power and will become witnesses of the Kingdom of Heaven to the "ends of the earth." In Luke's writing, the Gospel and in Acts, it is the Holy Spirit that empowers believers to witness, to evangelize, to speak, to begin their ministry. When Jesus was baptized, the Holy

Spirit, in the form of a dove, descended upon Jesus and then he began his work. In fact, he went into the wilderness in Luke “full of the Holy Spirit...and...led by the Spirit into the wilderness.”¹ It is the same in Acts: the Holy Spirit descends upon the disciples and from that moment, they go out into the world, telling it all about Jesus, their own ministry beginning as Jesus’ earthly ministry has ended. Whenever we have a baptism, or an ordination, or we consecrate the bread and the wine, we invite the Holy Spirit to come and make the actions, vows, and gifts we make and offer sacraments; real moments of experiencing God’s goodness and salvation.

There is a real tenderness in the words of Jesus as he concludes his final instructions to his friends with this prayer for them, for their coming ministry, for their safety. Jesus is praying that the Father keep these friends of his safe, that they know Jesus’ own joy, that they may know the same unity of relationship that Jesus and the Father have. That the holy love shared by God within God in Christ be within them as well. Jesus is preparing to leave them, and like a parent with grown children, launching them into the same world that would try and destroy Jesus.

But Jesus’ leaving, both here and at the ascension is not the end; while their physical proximity to him will change, the disciples won’t lose him, not really. Instead there will be a deepening of their relationship, and abiding that is more than physical presence, but will bring together the souls of Christ’s friends with the very Spirit of God. This is the relationship we have with God now, one that is both incarnate and spiritual where the fullness of God meets us in the entirety of our humanity. The Spirit has come to those places that lie deep within us, places that take mindfulness and attention to access. And when we let ourselves abide in our own depth, we open ourselves to experiencing God’s love in powerful ways. But we must pay attention, and nurture those places within us behind the first things we may see or assume about ourselves. It is no small thing to seek the divine within us by looking to the parts of our hearts that dwell behind the scenes, the places that show us who we truly are. These are places that may be tumultuous, broken, frightening to us. But it is also a sacred space, because we were formed in the image of God, the Spirit’s creative work has left evidence of her work; and it is there, in that depth, where the Spirit of God, who also dwells in those same deep places of creation, meets us.

For It is the Holy Spirit at work in those quiet places of our hearts, in the silence of the void before existence, it is her in the emptiness of the grave, those places we often don’t look to first where she is moving...planting seeds, bringing forth, whispering, calling. We don’t often notice the Holy Spirit, but she is there like the undertone. Often subtle, sometimes overwhelming, but always coloring everything. Amen.

¹ Luke 4:1