

The Spirit of the Lord

The spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
because the LORD has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor...

The spirit of the Lord rushes through Isaiah, and the smoking gun that verifies that he is taken up and into the Spirit is that good news is brought to the poor, captives are freed, the blind see, the deaf hear.

But the Spirit doesn't stop with Isaiah.

This same Spirit drives John the Baptist from the comforts of his upper class home, this son of a priestly family, he is from among the elite.

Yet, because the Spirit consumes him too, John makes his way out into the wilderness, out to a place of new beginnings, out to a people who know they need to start again.

The Spirit is still not finished.

Soon, it is Jesus who appears at the river's edge, Jesus upon whom the Spirit falls, Jesus who, filled with the Spirit, is pushed deep into the lonely desert, where he, for a long time, confronts his own demons, and returns as the One through whom the unpredictable, troublemaking, whimsical Spirit will invade the whole wide world....

"Are you the one who is to come, or do we wait for another," John's disciples ask of Jesus.

And the Spirit-filled Jesus tells the spirit-filled followers of the spirit-filled John to listen again to what spirit-filled Isaiah envisioned so long ago:

"Go tell John what you see and hear: The blind see, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news proclaimed to them."

And the Spirit doesn't stop there.

After the ministry, after the arrest and torture and execution of Jesus, while his best friends sit huddled in a dark upper room, this same Spirit blows away their cold feet, blows away their insecurities, and comes to sit like tongues of fire on each and every once-bowed head, and the Spirit drives them out of that place and into the world where they tell everyone who will listen that the Spirit of God is alive and on the move as she binds up the wounded and frees the captives, bringing good news to the poor!

And this same uncontainable and unrestrainable Spirit is alive and on the move in every generation since.

You'll remember St. Francis, who, like John the Baptist, comes from a privileged home, yet when the Spirit sweeps through him, there he stands, face to face, with filthy-rich dear old dad, as Francis strips off his \$200 Levi jeans and designer silk shirt, and begins a life that includes kissing those with leprosy, feeding the starving, and binding up any who are suffering.

The Spirit hasn't stopped yet.

Who is taken up by this Spirit of God?

Who are the anointed ones?

You are!

At your baptism, just like last week's baptism of young Grayson, the very same Spirit that animates Isaiah, that sends John into the desert, that propels the ministry and resurrection of Jesus, that creates the church through the first apostles, that moves so many throughout history, that same Spirit is in you and you are in her.

Now, at this point, I have to apologize.

I'm going to make a left hand turn and I hope you don't get whiplash.

But don't worry, this turn will meet up very shortly with the main road we're on this morning.

Promise!

Not long ago, a very dear priest friend of mine got himself in a bit of trouble when he decided not to include the Nicene Creed in every Sunday Mass.

You know the Nicene Creed.

We will be saying it in just a few minutes.

And depending on who the reader is this morning, we will be invited to "recite" it, to "say" it or to "affirm our faith in the words of" this creed.

And if we are honest, for many folks, it's more like reeling it off.

For many, the words aren't actually heard, rarely understood, and this whole exercise seems like little more than a rote recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance.

For many, the Nicene Creed **is** the religious version of the Pledge of Allegiance.

But what I hope you will see this morning, when we all together say the words of the creed, is that this creed has nothing to do with what you think of when you think about religion.

There's not a word about abortion or divorce or personal goodness or ethics or anything whatsoever that a person might do or not do to get herself on the right side of God.

Not a word about what **I need to do** to please God!

Instead, as you work your way through the Creed, what you will discover is that the Creed is all about **who God is**, and **what God has done** and is doing and will continue to do for and upon and on behalf **of us!**

It's a totally one-sided deal.

All of the saving comes from God's own initiative.

We are little more than dumb luck recipients.

Meaning, (and here we start to rejoin the main road of this morning's sermon), if you are feeding the hungry or tending to the sick or caring for the poor out of a sense of duty or in order to pad your heavenly bank account or out of a sense of guilt, stop, just stop.

The only attitude that allows us to swim in the magic of this quirky Holy Spirit is one that comes face to face with the fact that God indeed has done and continues to do all the work necessary for plopping us smack dab in the middle of this new

life.... and the only attitude that gets you into this new life is an attitude of gratitude.

Gratitude because, if you pay close attention to the Creed, there's not a single thing we do to earn or deserve our salvation.

All's we can do is say "thank you" to the gracious God who does all the work for us.

And from that place of gratitude, you and I are able to join that long parade of grateful people who, flabbergasted by the undeserved and unexpected kindness of God, can do nothing **but** "bring good news to the oppressed, and bind up the brokenhearted, and proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners...."

As you know, there's only two people mentioned in the Nicene Creed, aside from Jesus.

Pilate and Mary.

One says "no" to the gift of the Spirit.

The other says "yes."

What do you say?

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