

Four years ago today, on a bright, sunshiny morning, Dick Beebe and I pulled into the driveway of the rectory to await the moving van that would bring our furniture. The first part of that year had been difficult in ways I never imagined when I was ordained to the priesthood. The church I had been assigned to re-start after I graduated from seminary, a tiny church that had not had even a part time priest for almost thirty years, was unable, or unwilling, maybe both, to accept the changes necessary for their church to grow into the size they believed they wanted to be, and after two and half years the Bishop had had enough and pulled the diocesan funding that was paying my salary. We put our house on the market, thinking it could take months to sell, but it sold in ten days, closed a week later, and we were literally homeless, jobless, and churchless, too. A friend offered us her family's lake cabin and we were relieved to accept her offer. At least we would have a roof over our heads.

In the middle of all this, I was involved in search processes for three churches, one of them St. Francis, and another in Oklahoma that I was to visit for the second time a week after we visited here. The connection between me and the discernment committee here at St. Francis was immediate, and I was hopeful. The folks at the other church were nice, and I believed they were ready to call me to be their rector, but I just didn't feel the connection I felt here. Dick didn't either. On the last morning of our visit to Rutherfordton, he said to me, "I think you need to call the other church and withdraw from their process." And so I did. The time between my phone call to Oklahoma and the phone call inviting me to be your rector was scary. Had I been right to disconnect from that other church? What if Saint Francis decided not to call me here? I believed then, and I believe now, that it was the wind of the Holy Spirit that blew me here—far from home, away from everyone I knew except my husband and our dog, and away from everything I knew, everything that comforted me, everything I mistakenly believed would bring me peace and stability.

Perhaps you've found yourself in a similar situation, a time when you really didn't know what was coming next or how. That's what the disciples were facing in today's lesson from Acts. They were gathered in one place, remembering their Lord and Master, and no doubt remembering also that their own behavior in those horrible days we call Holy Week was not something to be particularly proud of. Jesus was gone from them, and despite three years of on-the-job training, they didn't really know what their next step would be. Then here comes the Holy Spirit, as a mighty wind, and divided tongues, like fire. I wonder which frightened them more: the stillness and indecision that accompanies grief, or the appearance of the Holy Spirit, the Advocate Jesus had promised them, who would not take "no" for an answer.

In the Nicene Creed, we say these words about the Holy Spirit:

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. With the Father and the Son he is worshiped and glorified. He has spoken through the Prophets.

We say we believe these things, but we don't spend a lot of time thinking about what they mean, and those words don't tell us much, not really. Our Catechism, the Outline of our Faith says this: The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity, God at work in the world and in the Church, even now. ~~ The Holy Spirit is revealed in the Old Covenant as the giver of life, the One who spoke through the Prophets. ~~ The Holy Spirit is revealed as the Lord who leads us into all truth and enables us to grow in the likeness of Christ. ~~ We recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit when we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are brought into love and harmony with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation. ~~ We recognize truths to be taught by the Holy Spirit when they are in accord with the Scriptures.

So that's where we are theologically, doctrinally in our definitions of the Holy Spirit. I wonder...do

those answers satisfy your desire to know the Holy Spirit for who he—or as I prefer, she—really is? They don't satisfy mine, although I believe that the men who wrote these words, just like the men who wrote the Nicene Creed, did the best they could to capture one who simply will not be captured. We spend a lot of time in the church trying to explain the inexplicable—God's almighty power, the divinity *and* humanity of Jesus Christ, and the essence of the Holy Spirit, whom we understand perhaps the least of all of the three persons of the Trinity.

Jesus called the Holy Spirit the Advocate. From our own context and experience, we think of that word, Advocate, in a legal sense, as one who argues for or supports a cause or a person, especially in a court of law. Here's a definition I think is better, although the difference is subtle: the Holy Spirit is one who supports or promotes the interests of another. *That* is my understanding of the Holy Spirit, or at least the beginning of my understanding.

Here are some other things I know and believe. The essence of the Holy Spirit is movement. Everything we read in scripture identifies the Spirit with movement. In today's passage, "there came a sound...it filled the entire house...it appeared...it filled them..." In Jesus baptism, the Holy Spirit came down like a dove. When we speak of our relationship with the Holy Spirit, we speak of how the Spirit has moved us or created movement in our lives. My understanding of the Holy Spirit is that she—or he, if you prefer—is also the one who moves us out of our comfort zone into those places that may be scary to us—to accept a new call in a new town in a new state, for example; to use our spiritual gifts in ways we've never before dared to do; to share our story about God in Christ in our lives with others; even in the simple but often difficult act of inviting someone to church. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the one who leads us, in various and unpredictable ways, to glorify God through our own lives, in the church and in the world.

And there's one more thing—God's Spirit not only empowers us, but also equips us. Just think of those disciples and all they did in Jesus' name after he left them. Could they have done the things they did without the Holy Spirit? Because they were human and I know my own human limitations, I doubt it. God sent God's Spirit to set them on their way and to accompany them in their Acts.

Yesterday it was my privilege to speak to the Diocesan Assembly of the Daughters of the King that met here at St. Francis. I talked with them about renewal, specifically about the need for us to continually examine ourselves as individual Christians, and also our church, and the organizations and groups that are part of it, to see if what we are doing expresses the beliefs and ideals that brought us together in the first place, and to reform and renew ourselves if we've lost sight of our focus. Self-examination is not easy; it calls us to admit things we might not want to admit, including the fact that we are comfortable right where we are. God's Spirit, I believe, is constantly changing with the situations and persons and places she finds herself in. She is adaptable, open to change, willing to change, because anyone who does not change cannot stay alive, and anything that cannot change will die. That's something for us to think about in this place where I was called, specifically to lead God's people in a new direction.

Four years ago when Dick and I pulled into the driveway of the rectory to await the moving van that would deliver our furniture, we didn't know that the furniture we had stored in a warehouse in Memphis—almost everything we owned—was just that day being loaded onto the van, and that it would be several days before it arrived. Looking back, I know that through my connection with the discernment committee and feeling of rightness in the call to come here, the Holy Spirit was letting me know this is where God wanted me to be. When the moving van didn't come, I got the message that things are not always as easy as we expect them to be, even when we *are* where God wants us, and I've been reminded of that continuously since I arrived here; I know that you have also. What I know, and what I pray you also know, is that in every moment, every day of our lives together, the Holy Spirit is leading us to that place in our journey where God wants us to be. Of course it might be easier if we stopped pulling so hard on the leash! But wherever we're going, and however we will get there, I pray that we will always trust the Holy Spirit to lead us. And I pray that together we may discover a sense of adventure and follow her. I'm certain we will not be disappointed! *Amen.*