

“On the Holy Spirit”
Acts 1:6-9
May 28th, 2017
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Next Sunday is Pentecost Sunday. I hope that you will wear something red and celebrate the presence of the Holy Spirit among us. In the next couple of Sundays, I will be focusing on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is essential to our Methodism tradition. Historically Methodism is deeply rooted in personal experience of the Holy Spirit. John Wesley’s assurance of faith and Methodist renewal movement began from the Holy Spirit’s personal touch in his heart firmly believing that God loves him! But in our contemporary times, we do not often talk about the Holy Spirit. This morning, let us learn about the Holy Spirit from Methodist perspective.

I want to share a joke about a Methodist preacher’s sermon and the Holy Spirit’s assistance.

A young and passionate pastor in his prayer decided to preach his message without any preparation nor any notes. His intent was to remove his personal interpretation, but totally he wanted to count on the Holy Spirit’s work within him. On that Sunday morning, in passion, he gave a long sermon to the congregation. He wondered how his message went. He prayed about it and heard a voice from above. It was the Holy Spirit saying, “My loving servant, you did a good job last Sunday. But why don’t you study when you preach next Sunday?”

The Holy Spirit in our Methodism is reasonable, intellectual and enthusiastic God! At seminary, I was strongly encouraged to prepare my sermons in a written form and still I do practice it. Historically Methodist preachers were expected to prepare their sermons publishable level rather than spontaneous preaching style. John Wesley, our Methodism founder always wrote his sermon scripts.

In Methodist tradition, reason, experience, tradition and the Bible are equally important channels to discern God’s will and presence in us. When Methodists talk about the Holy Spirit’s work, we do emphasize powerful personal experiences about the Holy Spirit, but we do not get rid of our intellectual sense and reason in our spiritual sense of the Holy Spirit. We seek a perfect balance between experience and reason. In our Methodism faith, the Holy Spirit dwells in us, goes before us, gently nudges, and helps us feel God’s love in us.

How do we know that the Holy Spirit is in us? I have been pondering over this question and finally I found an idea. Here I bring a small plant. Dedra Beauchamp handed out seeds to our children on Easter morning. My two sons planted them in this small pot and they are growing well. When I look at this plant, the image of the Holy Spirit is overlapped. There is a saying, *“Persevere like a seed; even when people try to bury you, flourish”* Isn't it amazing to see life in this tiny place? The Holy Spirit is God but we cannot see or touch Him. But we know that God of the Spirit is the giver of life, breath and power to give us life, and helps us grow and flourish in our lives. In Christianity, we believe that God is three persons in one. We often call it 'the Triune God'. We believe in the Father Creator, Jesus Christ, His only Son and the Holy Spirit. Creator God and Jesus Christ are easy to understand but how can we explain the presence of the Holy Spirit? We use various analogy to understand the reality of the Holy Spirit such as the wind, three forms of water (liquid form, ice and vapor). It shows the three different functions but the same one. The wind comes and goes as it pleases and we never actually see the wind itself. But we know and see its existence from its affects when the branches sway, for example.

I will share historical background about the argument of the Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed (325 A.D. and later confirmed 385 A.D.), the first and the oldest Christian faith doctrine which is accepted to every Christian church describes the Holy Spirit saying, *“We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son”* But there is still debate and disagreement between Roman Catholic and Russian/ Greece Orthodox church about the source of the Holy Spirit. Orthodox Christian church theologically wouldn't accept that the Holy Spirit comes from both the Father God and from the Son, Jesus Christ. The Orthodox Church believes that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, our Messiah and Savior but they wouldn't agree to the origin of the Holy Spirit. The Orthodox Church wouldn't admit that God and the Son Jesus Christ are the exactly same essence (substance). They argue that if God and Christ Jesus are the same, then does the Holy Spirit comes out of both the creator God and Jesus Christ? In other words, can a baby come out of two mothers? The Western Church highly emphasizes Jesus Christ as our God, and the Eastern Church emphasizes the mystery of God's presence. We call this “Filloque debate”. But it doesn't matter to us. Later in the Apostle's creed, it became more simple and concise. It just says, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.”

Why does the Holy Spirit matter to us? The Father God is creator of the world and universe and His only Son, Jesus was incarnation of God's love. Now, we can only feel the presence of God and His universal love through the work of the Holy Spirit in us. The Holy Spirit gives us power and strength and helps us be in touch with God and His direction.

Today is Ascension Sunday. After resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples and now he is returning back to His Heavenly Father. When Jesus told his disciples that he was going to His Heavenly Father, imagine his followers' reactions to say a good bye to their master, their Savior. His disciples were still struggling in their faith and concerned about their little and fragile faith community. They believe that Jesus Christ would rise into heaven to sit on the right hand of God, but emotionally, they were anxious, bewildered staring into the empty sky. Some were worrying about their uncertain future without their master. For his anxious disciples, Jesus assured that they would not be alone. He promised that the Holy Spirit would come and give them **power**. Jesus says to his disciples, "Receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

What does this mean for us? When we open ourselves to Jesus, our God, the Holy Spirit, we will have power to be strong. This power is not a political power but is the way to peace calming our inner turmoil. It is strength to move forward in life providing courage and boldness. The Holy Spirit is not a physical shape, but our guide and advocate who dwells in us and gives us guidance. By the Holy Spirit we have power beyond ourselves. John Wesley often asked a couple of questions to his congregation while he was preaching about the Holy Spirit, "First of all, is your hear right with God? Second, is your faith, filled with the energy of love?" and lastly, is your heart right toward your neighbor?"¹

Last Sunday, I was surprised to know that my son Jacob raised a question during children's time, "Why can't I feel Jesus?" Actually the question profoundly challenges me to think about my own answer. His question lingers in my mind echoing, "Do I really feel Jesus' presence in me?" "What does it mean to experience Jesus?" Last Tuesday night I had a chance to talk to Jacob and tried to share my response with him. But I was surprised again that he had already forgotten the question! Anyway, at bedtime, I told him that he doesn't have to worry about how to meet Jesus in person, because Jesus came to show us God's love. Whenever we feel that we are loved and we love others, God is there and Jesus is with us. And the Holy Spirit will help us. I was too passionate to convince him that Mommy and Daddy love him, but he seemed to be tired and ready to fall asleep soon. But he nodded his head that he knows that he is loved by Daddy and Mommy.

¹ <http://www.crivoice.org/cathspirit.html>

The Ascension day is a great reminder for us that God is with us always through the Holy Spirit. Wherever we practice love, God will be in us and we will be in God. Amen.