

How do we explain the inexplicable? How can we define the Holy Spirit? We use words to the best of our ability. Scripture, hymnody and poetry speak of the Spirit. That helps. In the music we have heard, and will hear this morning, many expressions that are used to give us a better idea of the role of the Spirit in our lives: our advocate, our guide, a dove whose wings protect us, a light that inflames our hearts.

In scripture heard this morning, the psalm writer, the author of Acts, who is Luke, and John, the beloved disciple and author of the Gospel all use words that attempt, to humans' best ability, to tell us who the Spirit is and how the Spirit is active in our lives.

Luke describes the rush of a violent wind and tongues of fire which allow us to speak other languages and understand people from all nations and cultures. He says that the Spirit gives all people; young and old, men and women, free and slave the ability to prophesy, that is to tell God's truth to others.

Do you remember reading in the Hebrew Scripture how some unscrupulous prophets of kings were known to just tell the king what he wanted to hear? A prophet would be summoned to court and the king would ask, "If we go to war with the so and so's will we win? What do you say, prophet?" And then the prophet, wanting to stay on the payroll, or perhaps to keep his head on his shoulders, would say whatever he thought the King wanted to hear, maybe tempering it with a bit of reality.

The dishonest prophet might reply, "Well, the spirits have told me that it will be a very hard-fought war but that in the end, if our armies are courageous, they will prevail." The prophecy might have been just vague enough that if the army lost, the prophet could presumably blame the army and not his bad fortune-telling.

John the disciple of Jesus, is intent on countering this behavior with Truth. He recalled God's true prophets who told the Truth no matter the cost. And John says that Jesus leaves us the Advocate, The Spirit of Truth. Why is truth so important to John? Why is that an element that bears repeating a number of times within this passage alone? Remember, it's in John's Gospel that Pilate famously asks Jesus, standing before him at the trial, "What is truth?" (John 18:38)

John wants us to know that God's Spirit, the Advocate that Jesus left for us when he departed this world, is our Truth Teller. The Holy Spirit will not mince words and will not equivocate. The Spirit will tell us the real deal. The Holy Spirit will give to us the truth that Jesus is the Son of God.

What we hear in three short passages of Scripture will not really tell us enough, though. We must be immersed in the Truth, filled with the words of God, to really have the Spirit's power soak into us.

So, I want to tell you of a fascinating adventure that a woman took around the year 390. Her name was Egeria. She was a woman from Western Europe who lived in the later part of the fourth century. The only things we know about her are found in a written account that she left about her travels as a pilgrim to Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Unfortunately, there large gaps because the only extant version of her writings has been damaged.<sup>i</sup> But what we do have is fascinating. She tells about being in Jerusalem for Feast of Pentecost.

She woke before dawn and went with many others to the place where tradition had it that Jesus was entombed and then raised from the dead. The church of the Holy Sepulcher had recently been erected there. The Pentecost service began before cockcrow. Prayers were said, scripture read, and songs sung. Then everyone went to the place where Jesus was thought to have been crucified, what she called the Martyrium. Prayers and hymns were offered there. They all went to what Egeria called Sion, probably the site of the ruined Second Temple. Worship was led there as well.

That sounds like a lovely morning of worship on an important day. But they were not finished. At that point everyone was dismissed to go to their homes for lunch. They were then reassembled at the Eleona, that is the Mount of Olives and specifically to the place where it is thought that Jesus ascended into heaven. There is a rock there, which I have seen, that possibly has a footprint indented in it. It is said to be the last place that Jesus stepped before he left the earth at his ascension.

Now one might think that would make a lovely conclusion to the day. The celebrating Christians having now toured all the spots of the most importance in the life, death resurrection and ascension of Jesus...at least those that are in walking distance of the Holy City. But the day was not over. Not by a long shot. After more liturgy and the blessing of catechumens, that is, people studying to be Christians, they went back down into the valley and up into the Old City and to the Martyrium again. At this point it would have been nightfall and hundreds of candles were lit for the continuation of the service at the foot of the old cross. And finally, there was a long candlelight procession back up to Sion where the final prayers of the evening were said. Here are Egeria's words:

"And so a great deal of toil is borne on this day, for the vigil at the Anastasis starts with the first cockcrow, and from then on throughout the whole day there is no stopping. Everything

that is celebrated is drawn out to the point that only at midnight, after the dismissal has been given at Sion, does everyone return home.”<sup>ii</sup>

And you thought our services at Trinity sometimes go a little long!

The Christians in Egeria’s day took their faith very seriously. They studied the words of the Gospel writers diligently and they believed that all Christians must draw near to God’s Spirit by being in the place where God came to earth. The Spirit of Truth lives not only in Jerusalem, which we well know. John testifies to that too, when in the fourth chapter of his Gospel he says:

But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”

(John. 4:23-24)

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<sup>i</sup> Wikipedia, “Egeria”.

<sup>ii</sup> J. Robert Wright, ed. Readings for the Daily Office from the Early Church, Church Pension Fund, “Eve of Pentecost”, pg. 232.