

Pentecost Sunday 5/27/07-- John 20:19-23, Acts 2:1-11 and 1 Cor.
12:4-13

A few years ago, I can remember somebody trying to explain to me that the Bible never contradicted itself. In fact, he based the veracity of the story of God on his belief that Holy Scripture was infallible and without contradiction. Unfortunately, I wasn't in a place where we could have a theological conversation in which I could point out some of the discrepancies or inconsistencies that I saw, so I just politely nodded.

This morning we are faced with one of the discrepancies that are sometimes found in Holy Scripture. If you listened carefully, you may have noticed that the Gospel writer John and Luke, the author of the book of Acts, have two very different accounts detailing the coming God's Holy Spirit.

Now please don't feel bad if you missed that discrepancy, because I have spent almost a week looking at and studying these texts.

Anyway, let's take the Gospel of John's account and dissect it for a moment. The account we have from John's Gospel tells the story of some of the disciples who had immediately following Jesus' death locked themselves away in a room, hiding from the Jews for fear of reprisal.

On the day of Christ's resurrection, Jesus comes into their midst and greets them, "Peace be with you." He shows them his wounds and commissions the disciples for ministry by saying. "As the Father has sent me so I send you." And with those words Jesus breaths the Holy Spirit upon them and entrusts to them the ministry of reconciliation.

Now in the book of Acts, we have an entirely different account of the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. Luke's account occurs fifty days after that first Easter Sunday. Jesus has already ascended into heaven leaving his disciples with the promise that they would receive the Holy Spirit. The disciples are gathered together somewhere when a great wind rushes in. And with that, wind appears tongues of fire that rest on each of the disciples.

And in that moment they are filled with God's Holy Spirit and are able to speak in languages and tongues that are foreign to them. People nearby hears the raucous and come to investigate what's going on. To their amazement, they find the disciples speaking in different languages so that all in the crowd are able to hear in their native tongue the good works of God.

We have two very different accounts of the coming of the Holy Spirit. John's account takes place on the first Easter Sunday while Luke's account takes place some fifty days later. John's account told of Jesus breathing the Holy Spirit upon the disciples while in Luke's account Jesus is no where to be found--- the Holy Spirit came with the rush of a wind.

Which account do we understand to be the "correct" account? Is Luke's account the way in which the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples or is John's account correct? Are they both correct? Did both accounts happen? Are they both wrong? The possibilities are potentially endless.

Perhaps the most important point is not exactly how the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples or that we have contradicting accounts, but maybe the truth that we find in both of these lessons is that the Holy Spirit did come and did dwell in the midst of the people of God.

In John's Gospel, the Spirit came and dwelt among the disciples empowering them to overcome the fear that had caused them to lock themselves in a room afraid to come out. The Spirit empowered them to be sent by Christ into the world to bring God's message of forgiveness and reconciliation.

While in the book of Acts, the Spirit rested upon the disciples, enabling them to speak God's message in a way that all could understand and experience the "mighty works of God." The Spirit's action would cause the conversion of 3,000 people that day.

Theologian, Alan Jones notes that the Holy Spirit's business is one of transformation. Our scripture lessons this morning attest to Jones' understanding of the transforming power of the Spirit.

For in John's Gospel we hear of the transformation of a group of people hidden in a locked room afraid for their lives into a band of confident believers who would eventually go forth to begin what would become the Church.

While, in the book of Acts, we hear of the transformation of an uneducated group of disciples into a multilingual machine responsible for the conversion of some 3,000 people in one day.

Sometimes that transformation of the Spirit comes dramatically with the rushing of a great wind and a pyrotechnic display of tongues of fire and sometimes that transformation comes more subtly with the subsiding of fear, a fear that caused some to lock out the world by hiding in a room.

I have found in my life the Holy Spirit not only to be transforming in the sense that I have described above, but more often the Holy Spirit is also one who come along side, one who encourages. This is in line with the understanding that the Gospel writer John has when he describes the Holy Spirit as “paraklete.”

One who comes along side of us! I imagine the paraklete like a close friend walking beside us. One who at times encourages us to unlock the doors that we are afraid to open, one who will step with us through those doors. And one who will stand with us when step through that door into the storm we know as the world.

The “paraklete” or God’s Holy Spirit is one who strengthens us for service or assures us of God’s presence in our times of trouble.

More often than not, the presence of “paraklete” comes to us in the experience of that “still small voice” deep within our hearts.

A voice that at times offers to us of assurance. A voice that is confident in our gifts and abilities. A voice that speaks love from the deep well of love that is only found abundantly in the heart of God.

The Spirit is also a voice that at times will say “no perhaps this is not the right direction for your life” this no even occurs at times when all else within us screams yes it is.

Often the theological questions and issues we raise cloud us from seeing the bigger picture or the more important picture. Somewhere deep in these sometimes flawed accounts of the life of Jesus or the life of the people of God is a much deeper truth. Today, that truth is a gift, a gift that Christ left with us when he moved from this world to the next. That gift is gift of the Holy Spirit.

May each of us experience the transforming power of that gift allowing the Holy Spirit to permeate our lives. May we listen to its voice, May we share its transforming love and may we like the paraklete come alongside someone and share the Holy Spirit that dwells deep within each one of us. **Amen.**