

The Day of Pentecost, May 23, 2015. St. Augustine's in-the-Woods, Freeland WA
John 15: 26-27, 16: 4b-15 Nigel Taber-Hamilton

To most of us, today's story is oh-so-familiar! The brief interregnum between Jesus' departure and the Spirit's presence is over – and notice how, in the absence of God during those brief ten days, the 'fall-back' posture for the disciples was to be in the Temple daily, praying and praising God. *Now that's confidence for you!* Their primary guide and mentor, their rock, the person who held it all together, departs, and yet they're celebrating! I think the author of John's Gospel completely understood how that could be so; it's why he placed the story of the giving of the Spirit – at least in an interim way – during his version of the Last Supper.

Essentially, John says to us, there was no interregnum, no gap – there is never a time when God is absent from this world, and there never has been. Paul had it completely right: nothing can separate us from the love of God.

That's all I'm going to say about Pentecost! Well, no! "All I'm going to say" that will sound like a traditional sermon about Pentecost. Today I want to talk about the Spirit in a way you may not have heard before.

I want to say that our understanding of the Spirit continues to develop – as it always has – as we as human beings, religious or not (and frankly there's really no such thing as a non-religious person!), as we as human beings go deeper into the mysteries of the universe and the human psyche. From long, long before Jesus the thinking about the Spirit of God has been both masculine and feminine - in fact more the latter than the former. The Old Testament sees "Spirit" and "Wisdom" – "Sophia" in Greek – as two faces of the same coin, and "Wisdom" is very decidedly feminine.

John's gospel shows us how "the Holy Spirit begins to perform a mothering role for us that's [about, that is] unconditional acceptance, love and caring." Having established that role, John shows how God then begins to parent us as both father and mother. (Dr. Neil Q. Hamilton, Drew University School of Theology)

The extra-canonical gospels (the ones that men like Irenaeus, Athanasius and Jerome excluded from the bible) see the Spirit's identity as primarily feminine; the Gospel of Thomas (Saying 101) and the Secret Book of James report Jesus identifying his "true Mother" as opposed to his earthly mother, as the source of his life, saying that this "true Mother" is the Holy Spirit.

Not only has the Wisdom, the Spirit been understood primarily in feminine terms from very early on, the Wisdom, it has also been understood as **a force that permeates all things, all creation** – Francis of Assisi, Hildegard of Bingen, Julian of Norwich, the great Islamic mystic and poet Rumi, the faith traditions of Hinduism and Zoroastrianism are just a few of the many who would recognize this creation-permeating force as something from and of God.

In our contemporary world Episcopal priest and theologian Matthew Fox and Roman Catholic priests and theologians Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry, and Dr. Brian Swimme,

have furthered the way we can understanding this Spirit and force of God through what is now called “creation spirituality.” Such a view has penetrated into secular culture: when Obi-Wan Kenobi describes the force as “an energy field created by all living things” which “surrounds us and penetrates us” and “binds the [universe] together,” that is a description of the Spirit of God in contemporary theology.

Tielhard de Chardin said that everything in existence has a physical as well as a spiritual dimension, and that it is the nature of all things to change – that the Universe **is**, in his words “a deep transfiguration process.” Not in a deep transfiguration process - it **IS** that process. Transfiguration, change, are not from God, they are of the essence of God. THEY **ARE** GOD. Love, truth, compassion and the energy and movement toward the good—all of these qualities, which we have regarded traditionally as divine are also powerfully embodied in the universe. The universe IS divine, because God’s Spirit, God’s force, permeates it all, including us.

Including us – we are a part of the Universe – we are, like the rest of the Universe, made up of those elements that came into existence at the Big Bang, the dust that swirled over billions of years to produces “galaxies, suns, the planets in their courses, and this fragile earth, our island home”.....and us.

We **are** star dust, all of us. The force, the Spirit of God permeates us; love, truth, compassion and the energy and movement toward the good—all permeate us, they are who we are.

It’s how Francis of Assisi could talk about “brother Sun” and “sister Moon” – we are deeply related to the rest of creation in ways more profound that we might every have realized, and the Spirit is what holds it all together.

This has profound implications for all of us. When the First Nations hunters prayed over the animals they killed for food, they thanked those animals for surrendering their lives that the tribe might continue to live; they thanked the Great Creator of the Sun and Moon and all that is for placing them in a place of such abundance, and they cared for the creation of which they knew they were a part because they considered it a gift from God – Everyone and everything was “in the hoop,” in the circle of life.

The Force, the Spirit of God, permeates us and all creation. There is a imperative, therefore, to care for all creation; to be aware that all of creation is profoundly sacred, and when we consume any part of it, to do so with care, prudence, and thankfulness that in a quite profound way, God continues that sacrificial life epitomized by Jesus in allowing us to consume that creation. That means, at the very least, that we should consider carefully how we continue to live within our consumerist culture, which is all about consumption of our natural resources.

It also calls us to consider the ways in which we are damaging creation, causing a situation that threatens life on this planet. In way ways can we live in harmony with creation that will prevent the climate change so obvious to us all?

And there’s another important imperative for us to consider carefully: how will we respond in

our world toward other human beings, each of whom is sacred, is valuable in God's eyes. Dwight D. Eisenhower understood this perfectly; remember what he said? ***“Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.”*** And we put ourselves on it.

All of this brings new meaning to the description long applied to this Day of Pentecost, of “the Birthday of the Church.” When we renew our baptismal vows in just a short moment, we are not only making specific promises to act in certain ways, we are also assenting to a particular understanding of our role in our world as its stewards. Any other response would be a denial of who we are: star-dust, part of the fabric of all-that-is; an expression of and a part of the Force that is the Spirit of God; it would be a denial that we share the divinity of creation – it would be a rejection of God

And so, on this day, let us again renew our promises, this time remembering who we are as we make them. Amen.