



Getting ready for takeoff. -Bill Skubi

Let us welcome this new year with a prayer:

God, our Holy Father, we come to you in the name of your Son, our savior, Jesus, praying that we may receive new each day the indwelling of your Holy Spirit, AMEN

The last time I spoke to you from the sanctuary was on February 10, just 11 months ago, and an instructive 11 months it has been for us all. The message at that time was this: **unlike Olympic athletes who compete under the banner of Faster, Higher, Stronger, the spiritual athlete is tested and perfected under a different banner, slower, deeper, more vulnerable.**

So, now that we are 11 months into the graduate course of **slower, deeper, more vulnerable** it is fair to ask what have we learned? Are we all wiser, more compassionate, and generous, more forgiving of ourselves and others, more reverent and devoted to God in our lives, have we taken all this quiet empty time to clear the clutter of our inner life to make room for the Holy Spirit?

In today's passage from Acts 19 we meet group of interested and engaged first century Christians in Ephesus, where we read,

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, "Did you receive the

Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” Then he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.” Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied— altogether there were about twelve of them. -Acts of the Apostles 19:1-7

At the beginning of this new Year, in this particularly pivotal time in the life of this parish, God has given us this remarkable scripture to consider. Paul meets a dozen believers in Ephesus. They came to faith under the instruction of Apollos, of whom we learn in the previous chapter of Acts,

“Now there arrived in Ephesus a Jew named Apollos, an Alexandrian by birth, an eloquent man, powerful in his use of the scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord and was full of spiritual fervor; and in discourse he taught accurately the facts about Jesus, though he knew only John’s baptism.” Acts 18:24-26

Now in the first century Mediterranean world Jerusalem might have been a spiritual center, but Alexandria was the undisputed center of learning, the OXFORD AND HARVARD of the ancient world rolled into one.

Apollos sounds like a perfect call candidate for Rector of St. Augustine’s, right? Well educated, check, Fervent in spirit, check, what could possibly be missing here. The answer is found in our scripture passage from today, when Paul asks the fervent Disciples of Apollos, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” they answer, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

If we take nothing else from the scripture today it is that spiritual fervor, learning, and good intentions cannot fill in where the Holy Spirit is missing. Period. Full Stop.

The intervening 2000 years of trinitarian Christianity makes it pretty unlikely that any of us “have never heard there is a Holy Spirit,” but that doesn’t mean we are always filled and alive with the Holy Spirit in our lives, both singular and communal. I think of married couples who descend from the heights of love for

one another to routine reference of “my husband” or “my wife.” It is really not that uncommon to meet married couples who refer to each other as He and She.

Let me suggest that a lively and continuous relationship with the Holy Spirit is just as important to church building in the present age as it was in the first Century. But the parables and lessons of the scripture arising from that time are illustrated by stories about shepherds, and farmers, wine growers and fishermen, the common occupations of that time.

I grew up in Seattle in the 1960s, the business of our place and time was making jet airliners so I will offer you the following lesson.

When each of us came off the baptismal assembly line we were all shiny new little Boeing jumbo jets, two wings and perfectly capable of flight. When we were rolled out onto the tarmac for the first time, sporting the colors and distinctive paint job of our family airline, we may feel wonderfully proud and fulfilled, but as long as we sit on the ground, though capable of flight, until we take off and are put into service, the Holy purpose of that baptismal assembly line will never be realized.

What does it take to get airborne – some flight training to be sure but filling our tank with fuel is the indispensable next step, in our case we must be filled with the Holy Spirit or we will never leave the ground. Some of us fly for a while, run out of fuel and end up spending a lot of our lives lined up on the tarmac.

As you know, a lot of good airplanes have been grounded this year, but that doesn't mean we have to wait for someone to fill us up. The wonderful thing about the Holy Spirit is that it flows into every life in different ways. For some a quiet hour of prayer might do the trick, another might find holy joy in feeding someone, another when they plant a garden, play the guitar, or sing, write a poem, or ride a horse, watch a bird in flight, or even fly an airplane.

For a few more months our church meetings will remain grounded, but that doesn't mean we cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit and take wing in the meantime. When we are once again cleared to gather let us have the Holy Spirit precede us, blow open the doors and fill the Narthex, Nave and Campbell Hall.

Living Holy Spirit, let this be our vision for the New Year.