

WGUMC May 24, 2015 "The Age of the Spirit"
Genesis 1:4b-7; I Samuel 16:11-13b; Mark 1:9-11;
Luke 4:16-19; John 14:25-27; Acts 2:1-21

Traces of the Spirit:

Genesis 1: "At the beginning of God's creating of the heavens and the earth/when the earth was wild and waste,/darkness over the face of ocean,/rushing-spirit of God hovering over the face of the waters—God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light." [Everett Fox's translation]

I Samuel 16: "Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward."

Mark 1: "In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him."

Luke 4: "Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee....When he came to Nazareth...he went to

the synagogue...He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him...“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

John 14: [Jesus said] “I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.”

What Stephen Hawking did for the Big Bang and Black Holes, someone needs to do for the Holy Spirit. Someone needs to write *A Brief History of the Holy Spirit* in order to make a mind-blowing story more accessible to us mere mortals.

The Spirit has a long and tumultuous history. It goes all the way back to God. Now, it's true that the early Christians weren't in total agreement as to whether the Holy Spirit was

fully God. It took a few centuries, but they eventually worked it out. The Nicene Creed says: "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life...."

The Holy Spirit was there at the very beginning of life, in Genesis, blowing as a wind over the waters of chaos at the dawn of creation and breathing the breath of life into the first human beings. *Ruach* is a feminine noun and the Hebrew word for wind, breath, and spirit. Without the holy breath, Adam would not have become a living soul.

But the Spirit didn't stop there. If you read the Bible, you'll notice she shows up whenever God is stirring things up. So, the Spirit descends upon young David when old Samuel anoints him king. The Spirit again comes upon Mary and she conceives a child to take the throne of David. When the child Jesus has grown, the Spirit descends upon him as he is coming up out of the waters of baptism. So you see, as the Bible tells it, wherever new life begins, whenever an old life takes a new

direction, and wherever a new world is under construction, there you will find the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus goes to the synagogue in Nazareth and reads the words of Isaiah—"The Spirit has anointed me to preach good news to the poor"—he is claiming the prophet's mantle. He's telling the hometown crowd that in the power of the Spirit, he will live a prophet's life and surely die a prophet's death. And later, when he is about to die, he promises his followers that the Spirit will anoint them, too, so that after he is gone, his work will go on.

The history of the Spirit didn't end with the time of the Apostles, even though many later Christians would come to believe that the Spirit's deeds of power did. But not Joachim of Fiore. Joachim was a 12th-century mystic who believed that the world was entering into a new age, the age of the Spirit.

According to Joachim, history is divided into three ages. The Old Testament period was the Age of the Father. Then

from the birth of Jesus until the year 1260 was the Age of the Son. This was also the Age of the Church with all of its sacramental structure. But when the Age of the Spirit came, the hierarchy of the Church would no longer be needed, the sacraments would no longer be necessary, because everyone could have direct access to God through the Holy Spirit. The true meaning of Scripture would be fully revealed and peace and justice would reign upon the earth.

Joachim didn't live long enough to see the dawning of the Age of the Spirit. He died in 1202. In 1263, his writings were condemned as heretical. And more than 800 years later, we still have popes and bishops and are still waiting for the reign of peace and justice.

But we never stop yearning for the Age of the Spirit, do we? We'd all like to have direct access to the Almighty. Wouldn't we? I'm not so sure we aren't living in the Age of the Spirit right now. Our problem is that we just don't know it. Do

you believe that God is at work in the world today? By whose agency does God dwell among us? Jesus said, "If you love me and obey the command I give you [to love one another], I will ask the One who sent me to give you another...Helper to be with you always—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept since the world neither sees her nor recognizes her; but you can recognize the Spirit because she remains with you and will be within you." [John 14:15-17, *Inclusive New Testament*, Priests for Equality]

Where in your life do you see the Spirit? Where in your heart does the Spirit dwell? These are questions that Methodists are probably not accustomed to answering. It's not that we doubt that the Spirit is alive and well among us. It's not that we deny that good things are going on all around us. It's that we were brought up to think that it is boasting to make the story of the Spirit a story about us. We'd rather folks suspect us of being spiritually dead than spiritually proud.

But it isn't boasting to tell others that the Spirit is doing good things in our life. It *is* boasting to talk about those good things without giving credit where credit is due. After all, we didn't make those good things happen. God alone is Good.

[Mark 10:18] So, we can't take credit for much of anything, least of all our faith.

Martin Luther's Small Catechism puts it: I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel.

The Holy Spirit is why you are here today. So, I ask you, "What is the Holy Spirit doing in your life?" Everything. Just open your eyes. When you were a few weeks old, who gave you your first smile? When you went off to school all by yourself, who went with you? When you found your true love, who nudged you to say, "I do"? When you were wrestling with a decision, calculating the risk, wondering why, who whispered,

"Why not?" When you were grieving God and going astray, who brought you back home and threw the party in heaven? When you were caught up in a crazy situation and didn't know what to pray, who interceded for you with sighs too deep for words? [Romans 8:26] And if someday you lose your health and can't hold on to hope, who's going to give you the will to live? The Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life.

You see, you have quite a story to tell. You could write the next chapter in the history of the Holy Spirit, starting with your baptism where you were, as our ritual puts it: incorporated by the Holy Spirit into God's new creation. It has likely been years since you were baptized, and there has probably been some serious backsliding along the way. If the role of the Holy Spirit is to make us faithful disciples of Jesus Christ, she is still writing your story.

My brief history of the Spirit can't end here. God's breath is still blowing over the waters of chaos in your life, still

breathing into you a living soul. So consider where you sense that the Spirit is working in you. What part of your life is still under construction, not yet ready for God's new creation? Where are your growing edges? Another way to ask that is: what are your problems, where is the pain? Because that's where grace is most active, where you are most likely to find the Spirit at work—bringing love, joy and peace, teaching kindness and generosity, instilling faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (all that wonderful fruit of the Spirit)—and out of the most difficult of circumstances bringing some good to those who love God. [Galatians 5:22-23; Roman 8:28]

My friends, we are living in the Age of the Spirit. I want to hear your story.