

## What does the Spirit DO?

<sup>4</sup>But I have said these things to you so that when their hour comes you may remember that I told you about them.

<sup>5</sup>I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. <sup>6</sup>But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, "Where are you going?" <sup>7</sup>But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. <sup>8</sup>Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. <sup>9</sup>And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement: <sup>10</sup>about sin, because they do not believe in me; <sup>11</sup>about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; <sup>12</sup>about judgement, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

<sup>13</sup> I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. <sup>14</sup>When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.

At this point in John's gospel, this is NOT what the friends of Jesus want to hear. Jesus is recorded as setting up his departure, and it is not going to be pleasant – never mind all the high-minded talk about glory and kingdoms coming from last week...but the tone is clear; Jesus is leaving and something else will be guiding those who chose to follow Jesus' way.

The book of Acts describes the arrival of this 'something else,' this gift of the Spirit – though let's not forget, there are other instances of that moment...

The risen Christ 'breathes on his disciples (John 20:22) and says, simply 'receive the Holy Spirit...' no fire – no muss – no fuss. A gift with instant effect.

Paul writes a lot about how to identify spiritual giftedness without worrying too much about how those particular gifts come to inhabit any one person or another...

And then, there's the work of God 'in former times.'

A mysterious wind hovering over the waters of chaotic creation – the Spirit that responds to the moods and needs of people as described throughout the Psalms – and in this strange episode from Genesis – so often associated with speech and language – with tongues and their unravelling – in which the 'divine presence' (aka, the Spirit) confuses the speech of all and sundry, so that each must go their

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separate ways, and this particular version of the 'grand human plan' is brought to a sudden and permanent halt.

All this begs the question; What DOES the Spirit **Do?**

The problem with a moment in the church calendar like Pentecost, is that we take something so complex and mysterious as the Spirit of the Living God, and try to reduce it to a single, fantastical event. But rather than looking for tongues of fire, or listening for some unifying babel that might mark us as the particular and blessed, I would urge you do dig deeper - think more broadly - in your search for the Spirit at work.

Scripture is full of examples that suggest our ancestors in faith expected divine activity in a way that we do not. We are suspicious of inexplicable things - we prefer answers to questions - but the record of Scripture is mostly questions and praise of the generosity of the unknown; the Spirit's wild and unfathomable work.

Does the Spirit move us to action? Is it simply a matter of 'being in the right place at the right time (as so often seems the case in Scripture?) or is God's activity part of that grand, unfathomable force of nature that offers us challenge and joy - frustration and fulfillment - confusion and hope -all at once?

For all my trying, studying, reading and praying - I can only define the Spirit by what it is not: This divine gift of the Spirit is not magic. It is not found by some formula of perfect prayer and pious living. The Spirit is not defined nor contained by the definitions or expectations of the faithful.

The Spirit is free because the Spirit is God - challenging, helping, empowering, encouraging. The Spirit gave birth to what we call the church, but the Spirit has also put an end to those human projects that fail to honour God. The Spirit is always with us as God is always with us – moving, shaping, changing us towards a more faithful vision of life in God's service.

May you find – in this sacrament we share, in the lives we lead – a greater awareness of The Spirit within you, among you, and around you. Amen