

It's hard to describe the Holy Spirit. In fact, it's probably an exercise in futility to attempt to describe the Holy Spirit because if we could describe the Holy Spirit then we would be able to define God and defining God is impossible for human beings. I think that is why so few of us talk about the Holy Spirit. We can handle names like God and Jesus, but when we get to the Holy Spirit we tend to shy away. There is nothing concrete about the Spirit of God.

Last week I was talking with someone about our worship service last Sunday. We both made the comment about how much we enjoyed the worship service. It's not that we don't enjoy or find all of our other worship services meaningless; rather, it's just that last Sunday had a special feeling to it. I was talking with another member who wasn't there who made the comment: "I heard Sunday was real good." I replied, "What was so good about it." He said, "I just heard it was good." "Was it the sermon, the choir, the hymns, communion?" I asked. "No," he said, "I just heard there was a real good feeling to the service." That was his way of saying, "The Holy Spirit was really moving." Are we allowed to say that in a Methodist church? Can we actually claim that the Spirit of God is moving in this place? Can we really talk about a God who is active among us through the Holy Spirit leading us to places we would not go on our own? Yes we can and we should.

We always talk about the Holy Spirit on Pentecost Sunday. We do it not so much because we feel moved by the Spirit, but because the Christian calendar has designated this Sunday as "Pentecost Sunday" so we talk about the Holy Spirit. It's almost as if we have said to God, "God, we are designating Sunday, May 11th to talk about the Holy Spirit. May 11th is Holy Spirit day!" Then the rest of the year we will largely ignore the idea that God's Spirit is moving and directing. I have to admit that I am guilty of this. I rarely mention the Holy Spirit when I speak of God. I can handle Jesus. Mention the name Jesus and images come to mind – feeding the 5,000, healing the lepers, standing up for the woman caught in adultery when no one else would, dying on a cross, standing next to an empty tomb, etc., but the Holy Spirit? What does the Holy Spirit look like?

I've heard sermons and lectures on the Holy Spirit and read books about the Holy Spirit, but when it comes down to it I'm like that duck that waddled into a convenience store one day. You have heard this story haven't you?

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A duck waddles into a convenience store, hops up onto the counter, and says to the guy working there, "Got any grapes?" The guy says, "I'm sorry. We don't have grapes." The duck nods, hops off the counter, and waddles out. The next day, the duck comes back, hops onto the counter, and asks, "Got any grapes." The guy sighs and says, "Let me explain. This is a convenience store. We don't carry produce. So no, I don't have grapes." Again, the duck nods, hops off the counter, and waddles out. Back he comes the next day, hops on the counter, and asks, "Got any grapes?" Now the convenience store guy is exasperated. "Listen, I explained to you that this store doesn't carry grapes. And if you ask me one more time I'll nail those feet of yours to the counter." The duck nods, hops off the counter, and waddles out.

The next day, the duck waddles in again, hops onto the counter, and asks, "Got any nails?" The guy behind the counter takes a deep breath and says, "You would really need to find a hardware store for that. No, I don't have any nails." The duck nods and says, "Good. Got any grapes?" The duck was not going to be educated about convenience stores! I believe it's the same way with me and the Holy Spirit. I am not going to be "educated" on the Holy Spirit. Like the thick-headed duck who wouldn't listen to the convenience store clerk, I too, have a mental block when it comes to the Holy Spirit.

But then I read this passage from I Corinthians and suddenly my perception of the Holy Spirit changed. I began to see the Holy Spirit not as something we grasp but as something that grasps us. It is a gift. Paul wrote this letter to the church at Corinth. There was division in the church on a number of issues so Paul addressed those issues in the letter and attempted to create a sense of unity and purpose among the church members. He wrote, "Now there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone." In other words, whatever we accomplish individually or as a church is by the grace of God. The Holy Spirit, therefore, is something we receive as a gift and we do not have to "understand" gifts.

This device (hold up an IPOD) was given to me. It is a gift. It is called an IPOD and it has the capability of holding many different songs and podcasts. I do not understand this device. I cannot comprehend how this little device can hold so many songs. I don't understand how pushing this one little button can activate so many activities at once, but that doesn't mean I don't enjoy the IPOD. Just because I don't understand how the

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IPOD really works, doesn't mean that I cannot use it. Just because we may not understand how the Holy Spirit works, doesn't mean that the Holy Spirit cannot use us or claim us.

The problem comes when we see gifts as things we own and control. John Claypool told a story about growing up during World War II. When World War II started his family did not own a washing machine so they sent all their clothes to the laundry. When gasoline was rationed, his father announced that the family could no longer drive to the laundry. About that time, a young business associate of John's father was drafted, and John's dad offered to let his family store their furniture in the Claypool's basement. It so happened that this family owned a green Bendix washing machine, and an arrangement was made for the Claypools to use the washing machine in exchange for providing storage space. Shortly after they left John's mother got sick and guess who got stuck doing the laundry for the family? For the next three years John developed a very intimate relationship with that old washing machine. But then the war ended and John's father's friend returned home.

John tells the rest of the story:

“One afternoon a trailer came and took all their stuff. I was at school at the time, and when I came home I was shocked to find the basement empty. And I was enraged that the old Bendix was gone. I bounded upstairs angrily and said to my mother, ‘Somebody has robbed us – the washing machine was gone!’”

“My mother sat me down and then taught me a lesson that would surface in my mind twenty-five years later. She said, ‘You have forgotten how the washing machine ever came to be in our basement. It never did belong to us. It always was a gracious gift. That we ever got to use it at all was great good fortune. You relate to gifts differently than you relate to possessions. With gifts, you receive them gratefully, hold them lightly. And when they are taken away, you use that occasion to give thanks that they were ever given at all.’”

I have come to the realization that there are so many gifts in our lives that go unnoticed and ignored. The Holy Spirit is one of those gifts. If we really understood just how close God is to us and that God literally lives inside of us through the Holy Spirit, I think we would all look at life differently. The great thing about the Holy Spirit is that it is not defined by us or manipulated by us or controlled by us. It blows and resides where it

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will as it wills. You just never know when the Holy Spirit is going to knock you off your feet.

Last Sunday we took up a love offering for Peter Luna. Peter graduated from Mexia High School last year and is currently attending Texas A&M. Peter was diagnosed with leukemia three weeks ago and is in Houston undergoing chemo treatments. He was the recipient of the Michael Nutt Good Guy scholarship last year. As you can imagine Art and Kathy Nutt have a special bond with Peter. They not only awarded him the scholarship in their son's name, but in a cruel irony Peter has the same type of leukemia that Michael had.

Art, Kathy, and I drove to Houston last Thursday to see Peter. We met him at his hotel where he is staying while receiving chemo treatments at M.D. Anderson. We called his brother Jose to get directions to the hotel. Art sat in the front seat with a G.P.S. while I drove and Kathy sat in the back wondering if would make it through Houston in one piece! We did, barely! We arrived at the Comfort Hotel off of Interstate 10 and drove around the back of the hotel to room 132. We knocked on the door and were greeted by Peter's brother Jose. We entered the room and noticed immediately that Peter was not feeling well. He was covered up in blankets on the bed. We visited for about an hour and enjoyed getting to know some of Peter's family, but it was difficult to see him in that condition.

About half-way through the conversation I handed Jose an envelope. Inside the envelope were a card and the money that we collected last Sunday for Peter to help with their expenses. The look of gratitude on their faces was priceless. But what happened next was beyond words. Kathy had made Peter a quilt to serve as a comfort blanket during his illness. Kathy got up from her chair and walked over to Peter's bed. She told him that she had made the quilt for him and that when he felt bad and discouraged to think of that quilt and be reminded that there are people who love him and are praying for him. She then removed the blanket that Peter had been using, and covered him up in a quilt made entirely out of love.

You know I am almost certain that three of us walked into room 132 on Thursday. It was just Art, Kathy, and me. I didn't see anyone else in the back seat or even the trunk. I know for certain it was just Art, Kathy, and me. But when Kathy placed the quilt on Peter I knew better. I knew that there were more than the three of us visiting Peter that day. And I think you may know who the fourth one was.