

Homily – Ocean Church Methodist Church – Jan 12, 2025

Isaiah 43:1-7

Psalm 29

Acts 8:14-17

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

The Gospel reading concludes with God showing his feelings toward Jesus through the Spirit, the main focus today. Spirit appears on three occasions in Genesis, seven more in the remainder of the Pentateuch, and hundreds in both Old and New Testaments.

Luke 42:003:022 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.

The meaning of Ghost has changed since Shakespeare's time, and modern translations replace Holy Ghost with Spirit. The meanings are identical.

I don't always find clarity in the texts between holy and human. Each of us has an independent spirit, and I believe the Holy Ghost today acts upon human spirit. One may or may not sense Spirit's guiding emanations.

John the Baptizer was guided to initiate a foundational Christian sacrament. Baptism ascended from sacred baths and

ritual washings in Judaism and beyond in the Middle East of Antiquity.

John's baptism rite more likely recalls and revives God's initial covenant with Israel at Sinai, in which the entire people were summoned to be "a kingdom of priests and holy nation" (Exd 19:6). The Baptizer is the final herald of the coming of Christ.

Luke summarizes John's preaching in three verbs: he *exhorts* all, he *proclaims good news* to the penitent, and he *reproves* (NIV, "rebukes") the impenitent.

Three events transpire at the baptism of Jesus that in the Jewish tradition signified the inauguration of God's kingdom at the end of the world: heaven was opened, the holy spirit descended on Jesus, and a voice from heaven spoke to Jesus.

Paul describes Abraham's receipt of the spirit in Galatians.

Galatians 48:003:007 Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

Galatians 48:003:008 And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

Galatians 48:003:009 So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

Galatians 48:003:014 That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

The promise to Moses in Exodus is indirect, but is more easily understood. Moses is complaining to God.

Exodus 02:033:019 And he [God] said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before thee; and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy.

In the desert the lawgiver seeks God's help with his people,

Numbers 04:011:014 I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.

Numbers 04:011:015 And if thou deal thus with me, kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, if I have found favour in thy sight; and let me not see my wretchedness.

God responds.

Numbers 04:011:017 And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.

Spirit takes up the causes of the prophets, but the Holy Ghost resides throughout humanity. Paul Tillich opines that God exists in every atom.

The spirit served Samuel when Saul sent messengers to kill David after he escaped to Ramah.

1_Samuel 09:019:020 And Saul sent messengers to take David: and when they saw the company of the prophets prophesying, and Samuel standing as appointed over them, the Spirit of God was upon the messengers of Saul, and they also prophesied.

1_Samuel 09:019:021 And when it was told Saul, he sent other messengers, and they prophesied likewise. And Saul sent messengers again the third time, and they prophesied also.

After three failed attempts, Saul failed to persuade the spirit.

1_Samuel 09:019:023 And he went thither to Naioth in Ramah: and the Spirit of God was upon him also, and he went on, and prophesied, until he came to Naioth in Ramah.

1_Samuel 09:019:024 And he stripped off his clothes also, and prophesied before Samuel in like manner, and lay down naked all that day and all that night. Wherefore they say, Is Saul also among the prophets?

Spirit returns to role as guide. Isaiah receives God's grace.

Isaiah 23:042:001 Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

Yet, the prophet shares Spirit.

Isaiah 23:042:005 Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:

And later in 2 Kings

I was surprised to note that Jeremiah the book is bereft of Spirit involvement, though his earlier work was more forthcoming. Spirit is busy at the end of first Kings in the military campaign against Aram.

Another military campaign proceeds, against Moab, and Elijah is called before the war is over. Before Elijah's ascension to heaven, Spirit concerns his successor.

2_Kings 12:002:009 And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

Isaiah appears in 2 Kings, and God gives Spirit the role of guide to Isaiah.

Isaiah 23:042:001 Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

And the Lord also provides spiritual sustenance to others who walk with God.

Isaiah 23:042:005 Thus saith God the LORD, he that created the heavens, and stretched them out; he that spread forth the earth, and that which cometh out of it; he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein:

While Jeremiah does not discuss Spirit in his book, Ezekiel and Daniel were more inspired.

Ezekiel 26:003:012 Then the spirit took me up, and I heard behind me a voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of the LORD from his place.

Daniel 27:005:011 There is a man in thy kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of thy father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, was found in him; whom the king Nebuchadnezzar thy father, the king, I say, thy father, made master of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers;

Daniel 27:005:012 Forasmuch as an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, interpreting of dreams, and shewing of hard sentences, and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar: now let Daniel be called, and he will shew the interpretation.

Yet, spirit does not necessarily offer succor.

Daniel 27:007:015 I Daniel was grieved in my spirit in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me.

By Jesus' time six hundred years later, spirit concentrates on the savior. While Jesus mind and perception is perfect, he perceives with the Spirit's aid.

Mark 41:002:008 And immediately when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts?

John 43:006:015 When Jesus therefore perceived that they would come and take him by force, to make him a king, he departed again into a mountain himself alone.

As fully human, Christ received support from Spirit when he healed.

After the crucifixion, Christ breathed Spirit onto the disciples providing them supernatural powers. Then, in Acts of the Apostles, Peter and John prayed for and laid their hands on worshipers at Samaria transmitting the Holy Spirit.

I believe Spirit is the source of free will. Luther penned *The Bondage of the Will* to deny its existence, but most of Christendom takes freedom of action for doctrine.

Yet, the march of Science finds no convincing evidence, though anecdotal evidence abounds. A human being behaves more or less as he or she did yesterday, and, seemingly, changes in one's behavior have the seed in his or her environment.

Yet, no explanation is found for many acts out-of-character. When a believer feels a call to ministry, Spirit is at work.

The UMC doctrine on Spirit is brief and to the point. The Holy Spirit is God's present activity in our midst. When we sense God's leading, God's challenge, or God's support or comfort, we say that it's the Holy Spirit at work.