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Grace Cathedral, San Francisco CA Z24
37b

Pentecost Day (Year C) 6:00 p.m. Eucharist
Sunday 9 June 2019 Anna Rossi's First Eucharist (& Peggy Lo)

Acts 2:1-12
Psalm 104:25-35,
Romans 8:14-17
John 14:8-17, (25-27)

What Is the Holy Spirit?

"And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind..." (Acts 2).

1. On February 18, 1866 the Reverend Mr. George Whipple arrived by ship at Ma'alaea Harbor on the Island of Maui. No one was there to meet the boat so his family walked seven miles to the other side of the island to seek out the people who had invited them.

Whipple traveled from Faribault, Minnesota to establish the first Episcopal Church on the island. He and his wife Mary brought their adopted Native American daughter Mokomanic.

The tribe had branded her with stripes on her arm so that she would never forget where she came from. These scars became for the family a kind of passport that helped them travel through Indian Territory safely. Mokomanic played the organ in the fledgling Church of the Good Shepherd. A legend even has it that her husband gave the land that the church sits on.¹

Every time I walk through those church doors I feel the power of the Holy Spirit. I think of this young woman and what it must have felt like to travel so far through such totally different worlds. She didn't have much control of her own life but the spirit worked through her. God's spirit can give us strength too. Mokomanic is my wife Heidi's great, great grandmother.

2. Today we celebrate the Feast of the Holy Spirit. The disciples were gathered together and a sound like the rush of a violent wind filled the house. What looked like tongues of fire appeared above their heads. Then they were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other languages.

Two sorts of people heard them. The first group was amazed and astonished. They marveled that people who seemed so unconnected to them could speak in their mother tongue. Trevor Noah writes about this in his autobiography.² He believes that language is a far more powerful bond than even our race. Noah learned many languages as he grew up in South Africa.

He remembers shopping with his aunt when the Afrikaans-speaking store-owner said to the security guard, "Follow those two in case they start robbing me." Without batting an eye and in perfect Afrikaans the aunt replied, "You should have told him to follow us customers in case we need some help." The shopkeeper apologized.

Noah remembers another time when he was walking a dark street late at night and some teenagers were giving each other instructions in Zulu about how they would rob him. Rather than running, he turned around and said, "Hey next time you want to mug someone why don't you invite me to join in too?" They laughed it off and left him alone.

This is not just about language, it is about connection. It is a miracle when any person really understands another. And yet encountering another is at the very heart of our humanity.

The second group that heard the disciples couldn't believe it. They saw the energy and the passion and mistook it for drunkenness. Isn't it extraordinary that this moment which seemed so powerful to some people was utterly lost on the others who were there? Isn't it amazing that those moments of holiness that mean so much to us can be completely dismissed by people around us?

3. The theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) wrote a massive kind of systematic theology. His *Church Dogmatics* is six million words long in twelve thick volumes with tiny print with parts in Latin, Greek, Hebrew and French. It was supposed to be five parts (The Word of God, God, Creation, Reconciliation, Redemption) but he died before he could start the last one.

In the third volume on Creation Barth gives his readers what he calls a theological anthropology. This is a picture of what a human being is. For him we are always close to being human and near to being inhuman. We are fully human when we really and openly encounter another person.³

The first thing he writes about being human is how important it is for us to really look each other in the eye (250ff). We need to see in such a way that we allow ourselves to really be visible. It means not hiding ourselves. It is hard to be open with other people but it is essential for our humanity.

Second, to really be human we need to listen to each other, to genuinely hear what others are saying to us even when it is difficult (252ff). This means not being defensive especially with people who are different from us. It means reaching beyond barriers of

race, gender, sexuality, age, nationality, etc. We always have a choice: we can use words to avoid others or we be open, to glide on the Holy Spirit and let it carry us to new places. This involves really saying who we are too.

Barth suggests that the third part of being human may be why we have so much trouble with the first two (260). We do not look each other in the eye, we do not open ourselves through speech because we do not want to give assistance. But this assistance is essential to our humanity. We are human when we help and when we allow ourselves to be helped.

But all this is not enough to understand our humanity. Seeing each other, listening and speaking openly, helping – is not enough. We need one more thing. For Barth we are human when we do these things gladly (265ff). We are most human when we really belong to each other in this way.

For Barth we are body and soul – both are essential, in his words neither diminishes the other (338). We are a body in our connection to the material world. Our soul describes our connection to invisible reality (351-54).

Soul and spirit are not the same thing. We are always soul but we have an experience of the spirit coming and going in our lives. Barth writes, "Spirit is... the operation of God upon... creation" (356). Spirit is how we understand the reality of our humanity. IT makes it possible to become more fully human. Spirit guides and strengthens us to see, hear, help and to do this with joy.

This evening I feel a little like a stranger tossed up by the ocean. On Friday at dawn I was surfing an east swell on the northshore of Maui and now I suddenly find myself int his sacred place. I came back because I knew that God's spirit would be in this place and I couldn't miss it.

Yesterday we ordained Peggy Lo as a transitional deacon. She learned about Christ right here. Her love of Jesus has been guiding her since. In August she will go to be a leader at the Church of St. Chrystostom in Chicago. Today is the first day she is serving as an ordained person.

We also ordained Anna Rossi as a priest yesterday. Tonight we will be the first ones to participate in her celebration of the Eucharist. I remember so well the first time I presided in church on the day after I was ordained. I felt so conscious that I was setting up habits for a whole lifetime.

During the years since then the church has been engaged in tremendous struggles and bitterness especially as we decided what life would be like for our LGBTQ+ clergy and members. But even in the most contentious times it has been an extraordinary joy to be part of this community. Sunday after Sunday we have worshiped with such gladness and I have experienced so much faithfulness and love.

I spoke with my teacher Margaret Miles about this yesterday. She said it reminded her of how Martin Luther used to say that if your heart is filled with joy in your ministry God must be present in it.

Anna and Peggy like Mokomanic and the first disciples you have faced so many obstacles. Your perseverance in your call, your dedication to this task deeply inspires me.

May you be your most open and human selves in every day of your ministry. Never forget where you came from or to whom you really belong. Continue to let the love of Jesus and the joy of the Holy Spirit guide and strengthen you.

¹ The Church website says that the land was granted to the congregation by King Kamehameha V. <http://www.goodshepherdmaui.org/history.html>

² Trevor Noah, *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood* (NY: Random House, 2016).

³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III.2 The Doctrine of Creation* tr. H. Knight, G.W. Bromiley, J.K.S. Reid, R.H. Fuller (NY: T&T Clark, 1960).