



ST. MARK'S ON THE CAMPUS

Episcopal Church & Student Center

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The Rev. Deacon Christine Grosh
Sermon for the 2nd Sunday in Lent
St. Mark's on the Campus
February 17, 2008

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| OT: Genesis 12:1-4a | Psalm 121 | Epistle: Romans 4:1-5,13-17 | Gospel: John 3:1-17 |
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ANCESTORS IN THE FAITH

Today I want to hand on to you one of the most valuable teachings that has been handed to me through the church. It's about being born again and the Holy Spirit. Is it the luck of the draw that I am speaking today? Did Fr. Jerry remember that I had asked to speak when the Holy Spirit would be in the lessons? Or did The Holy Spirit arrange this? I don't know. But I can tell you that every incident is so full of the Holy Spirit for me that I can hardly contain my enthusiasm some days!

Please hear the teaching of Jesus: Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. Do not be astonished when I tell you that you must be born from above. The gospel of John, chapter 1 verses 12 & 13, says, "Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. At verse 33, John says, "I would not have known him, except that the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is he who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' In Luke's account, John says to the crowd, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire."

- So are you twice born? Have you been baptized with the Holy Spirit?
- Have you been sitting in the church for years and never heard this?
- Some people not only ignore this biblical passage, they reject it.
- Why don't we hear much about this in our church?

There's talk in our church of empowering the laity. Where do you think power comes from? It's the Holy Spirit! Let's teach about the Holy Spirit! In the Education for Ministry curriculum, which is an excellent sample of Episcopalian culture, there is very little mention of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. This grieves me because this has been the core of my spiritual life, taught about and lived in the Episcopal Church! Yet, I can tell you that I've been in church every Sunday for decades, and this is rarely taught. So, I hope what Father Sam taught me doesn't get lost! Remember the Charismatic Renewal that started in 1967? It was an outburst of the Holy Spirit. This is how I'm honoring my ancestors in the faith, to tell you what they taught me! So what I am about to say will sound counter cultural. Please take what helps and leave the rest.

Being born again is one of those spiritual experiences that is a mystery. Jesus' explanation to Nicodemus is inadequate. I totally get what Nicodemus is saying! I can't go back into the womb and come out again! And No! I can't see the wind blowing. Jesus is frustrated with Nicodemus for his lack of acceptance of the teaching. He says, if you can't understand earthly things, how will you ever understand heavenly things! Would it work for you to just say, "I accept it because it's in the Bible?" Some people insist on understanding in order to believe. St. Augustine said, "Understanding is the reward of faith, therefore believe that you may understand." Sounds like there's merit in simple acceptance. Father Sam would always remind us of the passage, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief." Even our belief is incomplete on this earth. We're in the process of being made complete and mature. That's the basis on which I encourage you to accept the idea being born again, even if you don't understand it.

My personal tendency is to give a psychological explanation for spiritual things. But, that doesn't really work for being born again. I'm thinking of the idea of codependency... what you're really seeing of me is my false self, the self that is adapted to the world. I can turn that over to God and come to relate more from my true self. That is not a satisfactory explanation because being born again came way before my consciousness or any attempt to give my life to God. My experience came when I was in college, in an Episcopal Chapel at Grace Church in Chadron at a meeting of Chi Alpha, which is the college ministry of the Assembly of God Church. It was just a momentary feeling, it brought tears and the woman next to me realized what was happening. Then I felt embarrassed and didn't go back and didn't think about it again. 10 years went by. I was sitting in church and the lessons made me question whether I had been born again. I knelt and asked God. That Chi Alpha scene came to mind. That was when I was born again. No action from me caused me be born again.

People who have had this experience of being born again may be Baptized in the Holy Spirit. I am cautious about selling this because of the "and fire" phrase in Luke. If you go deeply into faith, you probably will get a baptism of fire. Baptism in the Holy Spirit gives people a sense of closeness with the Lord and a conversational access to the Lord. You can differentiate the two voices within. Here's what I say, but here's what the Lord says. How do I know that? It's just a feeling. It grows with use, like any thing else.

The scripture says, the sheep know the shepherd's voice. Many years ago, I was in a spiritual depression. I thought that the Holy Spirit had left me. As I prayed through this, I got a word of knowledge. It let me know what had robbed me and subsequent prayer told me a new baptism was coming. That was associated with coming to St. Mark's 10 years ago. The first Sunday that David and I visited here, Fr. Hanway went up and down the aisle sprinkling Holy Water. I knew that was the confirmation from the Holy Spirit, the fulfillment of the promise that a new baptism was coming. It's a good feeling to remember those experiences. St. Paul would call that edification of the body. In the Episcopal Church it's rare to hear people talk about the Lord so personally. People who are born again are likely to ask, "What is the Lord telling you?" They'll talk about discernment, wisdom as a spiritual gift, meaning something separate from one's intellect or reason. It's not the same as intuition. They might talk about head knowledge as opposed to Heart knowledge. They might talk about speaking in tongues, as in the Book of Acts. We commemorate that at Pentecost.

The evidence of the Holy Spirit often comes to me as synchronous events. Synchronicity is different from coincidence. I was taught there's no such thing as coincidence, it's God-incidence. That sounds simplistic, but being taught it and living it has been so wonderful! Let me tell you my latest God incident. The more people involved, the more complex, which makes an even bigger deal! The last couple of years, I would see our choir member, Pippa White (or Pippa Lawson, depending on how you know her) perform and I would be so moved! I prayed many times for some way to have her perform at St. Mark's. Pippa didn't seem that interested in the idea. But I was so sold on it that I asked her several times. Around Christmas, she said she'd find a couple of dates. She found one date. The idea went to the Campus Outreach Committee because Pippa had mentioned one of her plays that seemed to be a match for that ministry. The committee requested that we have co-sponsorship of the Women's Center at UNL. I went to Jan Deed's office, the director of the Women's Center, and proposed the idea. Here's the God part: Jan Deeds knows Pippa and she has seen the play Pippa will perform. It gets better: The date Pippa gave us is the start of Women's Week at UNL and the play will be the kick-off event of the week! How's that for co-incidence! One more to top it off: The theme is: The Way Women Lead. Pippa's play is stories of 6 women who influenced social change in our country! To me, this is a giant God-Incident! And yes, I must confess. I've seen good ideas fall through, so I was fearful knowing that what seemed like a good idea to me might never materialize. You'll see the advertising come out, the result of good work of our committee. If the Spirit moves you, PLEASE COME. After the play, Angels and Troublemakers, we'll meet to discuss gender and religious attitudes. That's on March 9th at 4 p.m.

Back to the Holy Spirit. What is it? It's the energy that comes from God. It's part of the Trinity, the Godhead, the 3-in-1! The paraclete, the Holy Comforter. It's the force that created the Universe. It's love. It's what's in the temple of our bodies. When the Hindu speaks of Prana, the Japanese of Ki and the Chinese of Chi, referring to the life force energy, the healing energy, I believe that's the same as the Holy Spirit. When I asked Fr. Sam Boman about the Holy Spirit, he said it was like the electricity. You see the lights are on, you know there is a conduit carrying the wires that transmit the electricity, but you do not actually see the power or energy. Can you feel the Holy Spirit? Some people can. Wesley, strange warming of the heart? That's the Holy Spirit.

Our spiritual lives are about mystery and engaging the unseen forces for good and resisting the unseen forces against good. So, I want to encourage you to put yourself in the way of mystery. Tell God you want Everything God has to give you. Educate yourself. Open yourself to the Spirit. If you're a Nicodemus type, go ahead and argue with God! God can hack it! The church and the clergy are here to serve you in the life-long journey of fulfilling God's plan for your life. Jesus and the Holy Spirit are God's agents for this process.

Jesus says it's OK to ask for the Holy Spirit at Luke 11, verses 9-13:

"Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. ...Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?" Be Bold, Be Brave! Ask to be born again! Ask for The Holy Spirit!