

Holy Spirit – Giver of Life

Sermon message of Pentecost St James and All Saints June 9th 2019

Keynote Bible Reading: John 14.8 – 17, 25 – 27, Genesis 1 – 2

The Holy Scriptures open with a profound theological truth – ‘In the beginning God created.....and next verse’the Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters. Another translation renders it ‘a wind from God moved.....’

We respond to this truth as we acknowledge in the Creed, ‘We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, *the giver of life*. Hebrew-Christian belief is of God creator. It’s a faith-statement as no human was there to watch it. Poetry expresses this as is described in the song ‘...hands that flung stars into space.’

We’re familiar with the Psalms praise of creation, of life ‘O Lord our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth. What are human beings that you made them...’

In the Book of Job, Elihu praises saying, ‘The spirit of the Lord has made me and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.’

In the early church this profound truth of a creator God is acknowledged in the proclamation of the gospel by the believers. They met together to pray, the prayer beginning ‘Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea and everything in them...’ (Acts 4). St Paul testified to the people of Athens, ‘The God who made the world and everything in it, who is Lord of heaven and earth..... (Acts 17).

As we think about life, and all that is around surely we are in admiration for it being ‘miracle’. Just think of a baby’s birth, or the beauty of the sunset and the intricacy of flowers, and the whole dynamic of growth.

Holy Spirit, giver of life.....take a moment to look at the photo of a window in the Church of the Holy Spirit in Las Vegas. Blue planet, a rainbow, wind, water, fire, a dove and fish in the sea, a portrayal of the Trinity, and the green of plants. Such beauty, such creation, reminding of the opening of GM Hopkins poem, ‘The world is charged with the grandeur of God.....’

How then one might ask how does this proclamation match up with *scientific explanation* of the start of life? What it has in common with the biblical description is that no human was there to watch as life began and developed, over billions of years. This ‘evolution’ has been used to debunk the Genesis account of creation. I recently read a very enlightening update in New Scientist (*) where scientific theory, indeed conjecture has developed. Rather than undermine faith in there being a Divine creator, for me it served to enhance belief in the amazing miracle that is life as we know and experience it. What is significant from its believed formation some 4.5 billion years ago are the chemical and geological elements that became present for all that is on planet earth and how they interacted to produce complex life. The article contends that for the first 3.5 billion years little is known of that time yet it contributed to there being life. It’s been described as ‘Life’s Dark Ages.’ A time of life such as it was of simple cells, microbes and organisms. There’s were times then when it’s been very hot, like molten magma, and believed two times of ‘snowball earth.’

Scientists are suggesting ‘a freak evolutionary event’ may have led to life forming from a mix of the chemicals present. Much is not known, for example how water came in such quantity, how life such as it was came to feed itself, where oxygen came from and how there became a balance of oxygen in the air to enable breath and not being poisoned. Quoting ‘the creation of complex life seems to have happened only once, suggesting it

was a freak event. If so that has cosmic implications. It means that although other planets could be home to simple cells, these might thrive for aeons without complex life ever arising.' The article concludes 'So, mysteries still remain. Life's Dark Ages have yet to be fully illuminated.... It's clear that life as we know it today would not exist without all the innovations that happened in the first 3.5 billion years.'

How much easier then to believe that rather than chance or random that 'The Spirit of God moved over the face of the waters.' I am left in awe of the Divine Creator who enabled life to begin and the world as we know it today. Holy Spirit, giver of life. How awesome to believe Jesus, 'The words I have spoken to you bring God's life-giving spirit. '(John 6.63)

How much then might we echo the question of the crowd to Peter, What should we do? And from the scientists, the warming of the planet in this century is an 'existential threat' - that is to life on Planet Earth. How much we need to care for creation and strive to preserve the life on earth. To maintain the fragile ecological balance in where we live. Truth from the Book of Genesis reminds of humans being given dominion to care for the created order. In this sense science and faith are at one. What I get from the scientists currently is an increased sense of urgency for humanity to act against pollution, rising sea levels, burning fossil fuels, and being protected from more severe weather - droughts and floods.

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2) There are two more aspects of the work of Holy Spirit giver of life. The Spirit gave humans the *gift of community*. A further truth of the Book of Genesis is in the words, 'it is not good for the man to be alone...' God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.' Thus, humans have lived in community from the earliest days.

Note Jesus in beginning his earthly ministry formed community, the disciples - learners and followers of the Way. Mary was earlier told to 'Go and tell the other disciples of the risen Jesus. So, it was at Pentecost 'they were all together in one place.....' Peter took on leadership. Men and women were a part as we read in the New Testament in the formation of community. Holy Spirit was poured out on the believers. Thus, Luke describes as the Spirit led 'they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ..All who believed were together and had all things in common..... (Acts 2).

The church today is to be a Spirit-led community. Hence, we pray enliven the church for its mission. The mission is to proclaim the gospel 'to all nations....' As we gather for Holy Communion our prayer is 'Empower our celebration with your Holy Spirit, feed us with your life, fire us with your love....' As we depart from the gathering of the community we are blessed by 'God, creator, redeemer and giver of life.'

3) Thirdly there's a *personal factor* of the Spirit's outpouring, of the love of God. The Sentence of the Day reads 'God's love has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.' (Rom 5) Thus there's teaching to 'live by the Spirit, walk in the Spirit, pray in the Spirit, be filled with the Spirit.'

Jesus had earlier told the disciples of the work of the Holy Spirit, including to teach, to help remember his teaching, to comfort, to be Paraclete - the one come alongside to help, to lead into truth, and to help discern between sin and righteousness and judgement.

Thus, I conclude with a prayer on the theme from our Prayer Book, 'God of power, may the boldness of your Spirit transform us, may the gentleness of your Spirit lead us, may the gifts of your Spirit be our goal and our strength, now and always.'