

The Holy Spirit and the Church

1 Corinthians 12:1-27

Last week we spoke about the church and the Anabaptists' aspirations about the church, and I promised that I had a few things to add. We do strive to live in the same kind of hope in our community, even knowing that we are imperfect. I want to add a few short words to that.

Fortunately, living into the church as Christ's body is not something that we need to achieve on our own. And so, we come to another strongly held belief: that it is the Holy Spirit, the aspect of the Divine, who enables and maintains the church. We don't need to do any of this on our own efforts.

Anabaptists knew and held on to the belief that and held on to the idea that the Holy Spirit regenerated people: new birth. And so all the ethical behaviour that was expected, is a combination of God's work in our lives and our own efforts.

This was going to be a metaphor-less meditation, but on my way driving to church I thought of the metaphor. And that is the idea of an e-bike. Coming down Woodbine there is a long hill. As a biker, if you are on the downhill you can just coast nobody needs to do anything, gravity just does it's work. But on the way back up, if you don't have an e-bike you are pedaling fairly hard to make it up that hill. So my idea is that the Holy Spirit is like the "e" in that e-bike. You still have to get on the bike, you still have to pedal, you still have to look for balance, you still are a biker. But that extra boost of power is there to help move things along.

At TUMC, this core value of trusting that the working of the Holy Spirit in each of us might not get articulated in those exact words very often. But it runs very deep. We assume that the Holy Spirit sustains us. That assumption lies behind the variety of people we see keeping things going: different speakers, worship and song leaders, the folks who sit on the Board, who keep the building functioning, who make the coffee, the folks who sit on committees, who lead Sunday School or clean up when everyone has left.

What happens here is more than just the healthy practice of volunteerism or service. It is an unfolding of all of us "obeying God's voice" as it were. This is one of the reasons we don't have a nominating committee here, but rather a Gift Discernment Committee. Trust

in the Spirit is also behind our practice of *prayerfully* (and that is a key word) discerning who will be part of the Caring Team and who will be part of the Preaching Teams. Because we want God's leading to choose the people who have been given those gifts. We pray for and assume that the Holy Spirit is guiding us and equipping us and will send the people and the talents that we need. We should also continue to practice recognizing and affirming gifts in others. If you haven't been doing that, get on it! :-)

We are church together, each called to bring our own gifts, whatever they are. It's not all in the "spiritual" realm, our experience is a gift, our knowledge is a gift, our talents are a gift, in so much as all good things come from God. We do try to come prepared on Sundays, to have the proper equipment, and to have agendas for our meetings etc. But we trust that it is the Holy Spirit that will empower our worship and help us to make good decisions. If you haven't been doing that, get on it!:-)

Trust in the Holy Spirit is behind our (sometimes painstaking) choice to use consensus as a decision-making process. We believe that everyone carries Divine wisdom through the Spirit and that holding power over one another is not God's way. It is good to always remember that we don't gather to further our opinions but rather to listen together for God's guidance. This is one of the reasons we always review our "discussion guidelines" before meetings, not because they are rules, but because they are touchstones reminding us that we wish our conversations and attitudes to be led by the Spirit.

One thing that is somewhat unique to Anabaptists is the role of the Holy Spirit in how we approach the Bible. We assemble our understanding of Scripture through a collage of communal interpretations. The wisdom of the Bible is not coming from an institutional authority, but rather from different insights and contexts and people. So in everything we do, even when we read scripture we are trusting in God's leading through the community. Stay tuned for an Anabaptist Bible coming soon, which is not a collection of expert insights, but a collection of congregation wisdom around Scripture.

I'm going to end with a quote from Mennonite theologian Jim Reimer¹ (aka Christina's dad), says about the "long career" of the Holy Spirit:

"At the creation of the world, the Spirit of God moved over the waters, helping to create order out of chaos. The Spirit gave life to the first human beings. The Spirit set Ezekiel down in the valley of dry bones and gave life to those bones. The prophet Joel announced that the Spirit would be poured out on all people (sons and daughters, male servants and female servants) on the day of the Lord.

¹ *Dogmatic Imagination*, James Reimer

The Spirit played an indispensable role in the conception of Jesus. The Spirit descended upon Jesus at his baptism and led him into the desert to be tempted. Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing was made possible through the Spirit. The Spirit was before, in and after Jesus.

Jesus promised the Spirit would come to his disciples after he was gone. Jesus was raised from the dead by the Spirit It is the Spirit that came to all the believers at Pentecost and gave birth to the church. ... It is the Spirit that has been present with the church throughout the ages and has given rise again and again to renewal movements within the church.

The Spirit of God is present here. As people continue to join this particular instance of the Body of Christ at Toronto United Mennonite Church, let us continue to tune our hearts to God's wisdom in our midst through other people and to trust in the care of God's Spirit for this community.