

“Have you Seen the Spirit?”

By: Rev. Damaris Whittaker

Scripture: John 14:15-21

Psalm 66:8-20

“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.”

Let us pray...

This weekend, Memorial Day Weekend, is a time when we remember...we remember those who went war and lost their lives there.

When we think about loss. There is more than one kind. While many soldiers lose their lives at war, others lose part of their lives while they are still living.

They come back with physical and emotional wounds that are irreversible. They lose limbs or return with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

They return changed by the violence—part of them has been lost. The unspeakable cost of war is high.

Even if we have not been to war, many of us know what it is to lose. We, too, lose in life. We experience the loss of a loved one who passes on, or lose them to illnesses like Alzheimer’s Disease or Dementia. We experience the loss of a marriage in divorce or a significant relationship. We suffer loss.

When I began serving at this church as your pastor, on my fifth month, I got a call from one of our dear members. She had gone to Texas to visit her family. There, she had fallen ill.

She called me one morning to say goodbye. She said, “Damaris, I’m calling to give you a heads up. I will be joining my husband in the Memorial Garden.” I asked her, “What do you mean?” She told me she was going to die. Then she said, “I just wanted to thank you and say ‘I love you’ before I do.”

That night she died, and that day, I saw the Spirit.

It is so difficult in our culture to speak about loss. We lose a loved one and in a couple of days we are expected to get over it in two days—to get over it.

When a friend speaks about their loss or their pain, we often stand there speechless, uncomfortable; perhaps we walk away because we do not know how to deal with the pain.

During adult class recently, someone asked, “Why is it so difficult for us to open up and let our feelings be known?”

In the Gospel lesson this morning, Jesus is saying his farewell to his disciples. It is Thursday, the evening before the crucifixion. Jesus understands the feeling of vulnerability the disciples were experiencing. The loss they were about to endure.

After sharing a meal with his disciples and offering them an example of selfless love and service, Jesus is now preparing them for his departure.

He was about to leave and he said to them, “I will not leave you orphaned.”

To be orphaned or left destitute is one of the most hopeless feelings. The word *orphaned* was also used to refer to the disciple of a departed teacher.

Jesus promised them, “I will send you another advocate.” Another, because Jesus was the first advocate.

Jesus promises the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of Truth.” Advocate “paracletus” which its basic meaning is to “come along side another.”

The Holy Spirit, for us, is a topic almost exclusively reserved for Pentecost.

Commentaries say that we often have a dysfunctional pneumatology. We do not know what to do with this member of the trinity. (Katherine Lewis, *Commentary: John*)

We are cautious of the way we refer to the Holy Spirit. There is a mystery about this Spirit.

But perhaps all it takes is some awareness to see the Spirit among us. This promise of an Advocate, the Spirit of Truth, was not reserved for the disciples alone.

Perhaps all it takes is for us to begin to “name” those Spirit moments, because the work of the Spirit continues to fall “afresh on us.”

I will begin by name some “Spirit” moments...

I see the Holy Spirit in the work of this congregation—not just in big or important events. I see it as we reach out in mercy, love, and compassion to each other and to the city.

I see the Holy Spirit’s guidance through the good times. I see the Spirit in the face of our children in church school.

I feel the Spirit when I sit in the living room of the members of this church; when I’ve shared a cup of coffee with you—I’ve seen the Spirit.

But I have seen the Spirit in our difficult meetings. Through the difficult decisions we’ve had to make together—there is a movement of the Spirit.

And when we have experienced loss, whatever that loss is defined to be, at those intersections where faith and courage was needed, there also was the Holy Spirit.

This is a Spirited Community. A community of Easter People! Perhaps a new identity for some.

The power of the Spirit extends beyond an empty tomb - beyond Easter. The Holy Spirit is with us every day.

Richard Burrige writes that “A church full of ‘Easter People’ will be a place where grieving or searching souls can be comforted, encouraged, and strengthened” because they sense God’s presence and God’s Spirit in our midst, inspiring and sustaining the life we share together, nourished for ministry in the word God loves (*The Lectionary Comment: The Gospels*)

So, this Sunday morning on the eve of Memorial Day, perhaps we are being called to let us name together our pain, and to also be a paracletus to each other.

You received an index card this morning. Please take a moment to write down something that you have mourned, something that you have lost. Perhaps it is a loved one; perhaps it is a relationship; perhaps it is an identity. Whatever it is, put it down.

Someone will be by to collect it from you shortly. We will pray for it this morning.

May the Advocate, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, lead us, heal us, and give us peace.