

“Spirit, Come?”

On many occasions we have used a phrase like, *“Holy Spirit, come.”* It comes in our prayers. Our opening hymn made this invocation, as did the Sequence Hymn. And we will repeat like words yet a few more times as we continue our worship. On one level, it is most appropriate for us thus to invoke the Holy Spirit, although I do believe that we ought to at least understand what it is we are doing when we do this.

Martin Luther once wrote: *“Omni salve est extra nos.”* — *“All salvation is outside of us.”* Luther was combating a sentiment rampant in the Church of his day and time which said that salvation was indeed from God, but that God expected us to meet Him at least part of the way. According to that view, which Luther so strongly rejected, we humans had to “do our part,”— shape up, as it were, “get our act together,” “do the right thing,” and any number of other aphorisms that still echo around the Church today. Luther labeled such notions as “Pelagian”— a term derived from the name of a Fourth century teacher of the church who championed such a view, which the Council of Nicea branded as heresy.

“All salvation is outside of us,” Luther countered to those who perpetuated that view in his day. *“God does it all,”* was his point, *“We are but recipients of His grace.”* We do not cooperate, we do not collaborate, we do not activate this salvation— we receive it, that is, we come to trust it, and then trust in it. Thus it is called faith, and it is the work of the Holy Spirit.

In Luke’s Gospel, we hear Jesus instruct the apostles to wait in the city [Jerusalem], ***“until you are clothed with power from on high.”*** [Luke 24:29] He was speaking of the Holy Spirit, who had been promised to, but not yet realized by, the disciples. Today we celebrate that event . . . the disciples waiting for the fulfillment of that promise, and not having any idea what to expect.

It is so hard for us to put ourselves in their shoes, to go back through the centuries and realize what must have been running through their minds as they sat for ten days in the upper room waiting for something . . . but what? What was this ***“power from on high”*** going to be like? Was it like lightning? Was it dangerous? What would the power do for them? What would it do in them? What might it do to them? They had no clue.

Oh, yes, Jesus had given indications like, ***“He will lead you into all truth,”*** and ***“He will take what is mine and give it to you.”*** But what did that tell them really? We cannot help but interpret their experiences in light of the later history that we know. They were imbued with gifts of healing, speaking in tongues, prophecy, and spiritual discernment, and these gifts became immediately evident in their ministry. As a result of these gifts, thousands and tens of thousands of people came to faith. So we can attest to what this ***“power from on high”*** would do in, to, and for them — it would transform their lives and their lives would transform the world.

In that upper room, before that Spirit, that ***“power from on high,”*** had come upon them, I am sure (although I have no Scriptural basis for this assertion) that those disciples prayed something like, ***“Spirit, come.”*** They had a promise from Jesus; they trusted that promise, even though they had nothing by way of experience to know how that promise would be fulfilled, how it would come into their lives, what it would look like — none of that!

What do we mean when we sing or say, ***“Come, Holy Spirit”***? Are we giving expression to the deepest longings of our heart, seeking that power which Jesus had promised to those first disciples? Or are we even more like them, without a clue what ***“Come, Holy Spirit”*** truly means?

Let’s see if I can help with two illustrations. I’ll invite someone in the pews to come forward. ***“_____ , come here for a moment.”*** I repeat the ***“come here”*** even after they have arrived by my side. As that

person gets by my side, I point out that my repeatedly asking them to “come here” becomes insulting and unnecessary. When they get to where I am, I say, “Now that you’re here, I have nothing to say to you. I called you up for no good reason. I really have nothing for you nor anything for you to do.”

Is this how it is between the Holy Spirit and us? Do we “invoke” the Holy Spirit, and then . . . Ignore that Spirit’s presence? Keep asking the Spirit to come when it is plain that the Spirit came ages ago? Is it that we say we want the Holy Spirit, but we are not quite sure what it is we want the Holy Spirit for? What is the Spirit supposed to do . . . in us . . . for us . . . to us . . . through us?

Let’s look at a different invocation and see if that can shed some light here. We quite often begin our worship thus: “*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.*” (We can talk some more next Sunday about what that means.) For now . . . we call this “the invocation” — from the Latin, *invocare*, “to call in” or “to summon.” I think it is almost universally understood that we begin our worship with those words on the assumption that we are asking the Triune God to come and take a central place as we gather for worship. So much for universal or conventional wisdom.

That is not what is happening (at least, it is not what should be happening). Think it through for a moment — at what point in the relationship did God ever give you permission to summon Him? Address Him? Certainly. Call out to Him? You bet! While no one I know would ever say it this way, this view of the invocation amounts to us saying to God, “*Hey God! Get your butt down here!*” If I were to lead off our worship experience with those words, you would all — rightly — scurry me off to the nearest mental health facility.

What is really going on in those words, “*In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit*” is that we are invoking the memory

and thus the power of our baptisms. It is not that we are bidding God to come to a place where God would not otherwise choose to be (Jesus had already promised us, that “*where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them*” — let me make sure I emphasize the present tense: “*I am there*”). No, we are reminding ourselves that God has summoned us to stand in His presence, and He has made it possible for us to do that by virtue of our baptisms.

We cannot order God to come and go at our bidding (although, God knows I have heard many a prayer that seems to flow from the assumption that this is precisely what many people think they are doing). We come at His bidding; we go at His command and commission — that’s the truth of it.

Now, let’s take the words, “*Spirit, come*” and examine them in light of that. Before we ever say those words, where is the Holy Spirit — in a galaxy far, far away? Up in heaven? In some unknown dimension? No! Right here! The Spirit is right here! So why do we need to say, “*Spirit, come*”?

On one level, we don’t! We cannot bring the Holy Spirit by those words, even if we wanted to! We have no power to do so! But on another level — like with our worship-opening invocation — we do remind ourselves that we need a greater awareness of that Spirit’s presence. I know some people who I think are pretty much in touch with the Holy Spirit. I have witnessed their devotional life, their prayer life, the way they witness to people, the way in which they employ spiritual gifts. But even the most ardent practitioner of spiritual disciplines needs a greater awareness of the Spirit’s presence. Most of the rest of us desperately need a “spiritual dope slap” to awaken us to the reality of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Okay, so now I will say, “*Spirit, come*” and I will mean “*Spirit, make me the more deeply aware of where you are touching my life.*” Remember when I called someone up front and kept saying “*Come here*”? We

cannot fall into that trap with the Holy Spirit.

If you desire a fuller, richer, and deeper awareness of who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit is doing in, for, and through your life, then when you say, “*Spirit, come,*” you need to **shut you** so that the Spirit can be known. Shut up (just stand in the Spirit’s presence and sense the radiance of the power, the beauty, the glory that is upon you). Shut down (stop being so “busy” and let this time wash over you, wash you clean). Shut off (get rid of the TV, the CD’s, the DVD’s, MP3’s and all the other distractions that modern life puts at our disposal, and let the voice of the Spirit speak into your heart). And then shut yourself away — go to a quiet, safe place where in prayer, meditation, and communion with the Spirit you can discover the ways that the Holy Spirit wants to use you.

I read in an older edition of the journal, The Christian Century, where it had pulled from an earlier edition of *Weavings*, a spiritual journal: “*A quiet, unassuming woman asked her pastor whether she could accompany him on hospital visits. When he agreed, she asked whether she could pray for the patients they visited. To his great wonderment, over several weeks the people this woman prayed for seemed to get well, some physically, others spiritually. He asked her, ‘Do you think you have the Spirit’s gift of healing?’ Yes, she had thought so for two years. Why hadn’t she said anything about it before? he wondered. ‘Because you never asked me, and I didn’t know what to do with it.’*”

It is often hard to pray, “Spirit, come,” and then to know what the response of the Spirit has been. This is why God places us into a community of faith, where the Spirit is at work in every person (whether they are aware of that working or not) so that the faith community can validate what the Spirit seeks to do.

“Now there are varieties of gifts,” Paul teaches us, “but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in

everyone.” Did you catch it? Let me say it again: ***“the same God ...activates all of them in everyone.”***

You have a gift from the Spirit. Do you know it? Do you use it? If not, talk to me and ask about ways that you can discover what that gift (or those gifts) may be . . . then pray, *“Spirit, come — make me aware more and more that You are here with me, beside me, in me, closer than my very breath, deeper than my breathing — fill me with Your presence until I am aglow with You.”*

Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Amen.