

**Acts 2:1-11**

**Psalm 104**

**1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13**

**John 20:19-23**

**Homilist: Deacon Mike Mocek**

**May 31, 2020**

I suspect many of you have heard the parable of the blind men and the elephant. This parable does not come from Scripture but is believed to have had its origins on the ancient subcontinent of India. As the story goes, six blind men encounter an elephant for the first time in their village. They decide to inspect this strange new animal through the sense of touch and then describe it. One man feels the elephant's trunk and says the animal is like a giant snake. Another feels its ear and says the animal is like a fan. The third man feels its leg and says the animal is like a tree. The fourth feels its side and says the animal is like a wall. The fifth feels a tusk and says the animal is like a spear. And the sixth man feels its tail and says the animal is like a rope.

Believe it or not, the elephant in that ancient parable and the Holy Spirit have something in common. Our readings today are all about the Holy Spirit. And the three authors – Luke, Paul, and John – describe the Holy Spirit differently, each from his own perspective, and each according to the needs of his respective audience. In the first reading, taken from the Acts of the Apostles, Luke has the Spirit descending on the disciples quite dramatically, with noise like a strong driving wind and tongues as of fire coming to rest over each of them. The disciples were emboldened by this. They went out. They proclaimed the mighty deeds of God to people who had gathered in Jerusalem from all nations. And all could understand them in their own native languages. In the second reading, Paul tells the sharply divided Christian community of Corinth that the Holy Spirit is at work in each one of them. They have each received unique spiritual gifts that God orchestrates for the common good of all.

Paul encourages the people to put aside their differences, appreciate the gifts of others, and unite in doing the will of God. And in the Gospel, John describes the Holy Spirit as the breath of Jesus offering peace to the very followers who had betrayed him and had abandoned him during his darkest hours. Then, Jesus sends these disciples out to continue the mission of love, compassion, and forgiveness that had been given him by the Father.

So, which of these three authors got it right? Is the Holy Spirit a dramatic and enabling force as Luke taught? Does the Holy Spirit convey unique spiritual gifts as Paul taught? Or does the Holy Spirit inspire peace and forgiveness as John taught? These are three seriously different teachings, and in our dualistic society, whenever we encounter differences, we tend to believe that someone must be right, and someone must be wrong. And, we love to argue about that. But God is not bound by the norms of our society. Rather than being mutually exclusive, these teachings complement each other. The Holy Spirit is all these things and more.

A couple of weeks ago, Father Hoa talked about the difficulty many of us have with our understanding of the Holy Spirit. This third person of the Trinity is not an easy concept for us to grasp. But the characterization that works best for me is that the Holy Spirit is God dwelling in us and with us, both as individuals and as a community. The Holy Spirit motivates us and strengthens us to follow Jesus by treating one another with love, compassion, and forgiveness. The Holy Spirit grooms us with spiritual gifts and sends us out in missionary discipleship just as Jesus instructed his first disciples to “Go and make disciples of all nations.” As Jesus promised, the Holy Spirit is always with us. But we make special note of that presence when we receive the sacraments of initiation, especially Baptism and Confirmation. Several members of our community are being baptized and confirmed this weekend. So as they receive the Holy Spirit

sacramentally, let us all join them in following our common baptismal call to missionary discipleship – by going out and proclaiming the Good News of the Gospel beyond the walls of this church through all that we say, and more importantly, all that we do and by treating one another with love, compassion, and forgiveness.

Over the years, the parable of the blind men and the elephant has been given various endings. In some versions, the six men dwell on their differences. They suspect one another of lying. They argue among themselves and even come to blows. In other versions, the men listen rather than argue. They collaborate with one another, merge their perspectives, and come up with an image of the elephant that is more accurate and more complete than any of them had alone. This parable illustrates that while experiences yield truth, our personal experiences are limited, and when we fail to account for the experiences of others, we may not find the complete truth. That notion applies to Holy Scripture as well. Scripture is not meant to be cherry-picked, as we are so often tempted to do. Rather, God is revealed to us in the totality of Scripture just as the Holy Spirit was revealed to us today when we drew together the writings of Luke, Paul, and John.