

Sermon for the 6th Sunday of Easter

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Grace Church in Scarborough

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Seasons of the Spirit.

I am getting on in life, as are some of you. My children are now young adults and I am fascinated to watch them in their journey. All of them are single, none with steady jobs, all are un-rooted and will move before too long. Each time we speak they are full of new ideas, interests, excitement and plans.

I was like that too in my 20's. It was like being on a bike, which I often was, free to go this way or that and not worry about too much. Free to tie up here for a bit or move on. Go left, go right, stop or start, whatever!

Then I fell in love and got married. A twosome! We were both open to moves and had a sense of anything being possible. We even emigrated to Canada, worked in Montreal then up north in Kapuskasing, and then moved on again. But we were two, and each move was negotiated. Then we were a family and we settled in Guelph and our children grew up. Roots grew out of our feet and we bought a house and had debts and bills and responsibilities. We slowed right down. We accumulated crockery and furniture worth keeping. We got careers instead of jobs, and friendships rather than acquaintances.

Then the kids all left home and the house rattled, and it was time for all those other dreams to come to life again, the dreams which you tell to go away because you are busy and responsible adults now. So we sold up and said goodbye and went exploring again.

You could probably notice the same sort of movement in your own lives. There are really different periods in the way you behave and respond to things. You move from playful to stodgy, from experimental to safe, and then from dull to curious, from cautious to risking again.

Listening to the readings, which are all about "God at work in us through the Holy Spirit" I feel the same shifting of seasons of the Spirit.

In Acts the Apostles are just like 20 year olds. "Let's go here!" OK! "Now lets see where this path leads" Yep! And to and fro they go, living in the present moment, just following where the Spirit leads them. It is delightful and reminds me of my early days of faith as young, single guy.

The Psalm is about the Spirit in midlife. The psalmist is in the world of sewing and harvesting, friendships and good neighbours, family and business all going well. It is a thanksgiving for being in the midst of goodness. You remember when you were climbing out of debt, getting on in life and it was getting better each year? You recall the feeling of security growing, and anxiety diminishing? This is the time of praise and thanksgiving to the Father the Creator and Sustainer of all things

In the Gospel the Holy Spirit is a comforter and a teacher. This is that moment in life when your marriage breaks up, or you lose your job and the world seems to be falling apart. It is when you have no strength or hope or understanding. It was for me the loss of my children. I ached with sadness and grief when they left. I rejoiced for them but I felt empty and unfocussed. My parents were dying. My past was finished, and in my future I felt redundant and without clear purpose. Then the Spirit gently heals you, teaches you, remakes you.

The Revelation reading is from a later stage where I feel that the author has landed in his ministry and is deeply engaged in one place with one set of people. Maybe there are worries and responsibilities and all the stuff of a rooted life. He is not doing much that may seem dramatic, but he is looking past the

present to a distant guiding vision which keeps him going forward even when he appears to be standing still. The Holy Spirit is allowing him the Vision of God which makes the work he is doing right now be valuable, honourable and filled with meaning.

So I think the Holy Spirit is not one thing, or one way to meet God, or the same at all times. The Spirit blows where She wills. Hot or cold, fierce or gentle, destructive or building up. The Spirit moves. There are seasons of the Spirit.

So where are you in life ?

Are you young and travelling light, no plans and open to the moment? Then maybe you should be reading Acts a lot.

Are you settling, building, rooting into new life? Do you feel yourself being blessed in goodness and joys? Then maybe you should be looking at this psalm for your clues to the Spirit of God.

Are you in change and feeling that you are looking at endings? Are things are coming to a close, it is unclear what use you are anymore, and the future is opaque? Then it is the comforter, the teacher, the one who will lead you into all truth to whom you need to pray.

Or are you now finding yourself looking beyond the "now" and comfortably letting go of hanging on? Is it that where you are matters less than where you might be heading, and you are getting to the point where what you are doing is less important than why you do it, or who you do it for? Then Revelation may be for you. It talks of the Spirit in "Picture Language", images, poetry and metaphor, things detached from literal understanding. It is pointing beyond itself, ready to fly up and away.

I have had my moments of feeling; "Oh, I used to be in the Spirit, but then I got dull and gave it up." But that is like wishing I could always be 22 and single. And that would wear thin very fast! I have had times of feeling blissfully happy, but that too moves along. And I have found myself far from the old certainties of God, and wondering if I have lost my way, but the Spirit has just been showing me a new way. And already, though I am not that old really, the Spirit is teaching me to look beyond, and shake off the things which seemed once to define me. Like an old coat I am ready to leave on a bench, things lighten in value and something far away calls quietly.

I invite you to look at where the Spirit has been in your life, shifting about, as She does, never quite catchable.

Don't judge yourself, as I often have, but pause to read which season the Spirit has you in, and let her be with you in ways you have never known before.

And don't worry if you move to and fro between the seasons of the Spirit. There is no Orthodox Path to follow, just the wind blowing and turning and giving life, eternal life to you in her love.