

Acts 19:1-7

While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” Then he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.” Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—altogether there were about twelve of them.

Mark 1:4–11

John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now John was clothed with camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. He proclaimed, “The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

Mark 1:4-11, 2015

The question came up at my Tuesday bible study,
“Why is it so hard to see the work and power of the
Holy Spirit in people’s lives.

We look around and see the way people treat one
another, the violence,
even among Christians and in the church the
conflict, and petty arguing that goes on
sometimes.

Is the Holy Spirit alive in these people’s hearts and lives?”
You wonder.

You wonder, especially about those who call themselves
Christians because your understanding is that, not only are
we called to live according to the law of God;
to love god with all your heart and all your strength,
and your neighbor as yourself,

but we have also been given the gift of the Holy Spirit
and all His power so that we may be empowered to
live lives that honor, and respect the other,

to live lives that help the needy and proclaim the
love and grace of God through Jesus Christ that
many in today’s terrorized and war-torn world
need to hear.

We say we believe that there is a transformative power in the Spirit that works in us to change our lives and lead us to change the world we live in,

even if it is only in your world defined by the little neighborhood you live in, the circle of friends you share your life with,

in the world of the clerk at the grocery store you treat with kindness,

the world of the nurse who cares for you while you or a loved one is in the hospital and you provide the words of grace and love they need to hear.

Do you witness the power and work of the transformed life in this world?

Do you live the transformed life each day as you go about your daily business at work, school, shopping, running the kids from place to place, diving up and down Dunlawton Ave?

In our Gospel lesson we read about two different baptisms.

The first is the baptism of John the Baptist which is a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

And then there is this other baptism, the baptism of Jesus when the heavens are torn apart and the Spirit descends like a dove upon Him.

And a voice came from heaven, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.”

John had prophesied that one would come who would baptize with the Holy Spirit, not just water.

Jesus is the one who gives the gift of the Spirit He himself received in his own baptism.

Likewise our lesson from Acts distinguishes between these two baptisms as Paul encounters 12 disciples who were baptized

“Into John’s baptism.” Through which they did not receive the Holy Spirit.

In fact they didn’t even know about the Holy Spirit.

Paul then baptizes them into the name of the Lord Jesus.

When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.

Their lives were transformed; they were changed.

And so it is with your baptism.

This week I read an article in the WELCA Gather magazine entitled, Barriers to Transformation, by Sara Olson-Smith.

In that article she talked about how we fight this transformation of our lives the Spirit of God tries to work in us.

She gives some great examples of how and why people resist this change.

Often it is the fear of change itself, but she offers that it is often also because there is “too Much of Something.”

Not going to a funeral visitation to pay condolences to a friend whose son had died from suicide because there was too much unease with both her pain and her friend’s.

Avoiding bible study by keeping the schedule too full because you are comfortable with your life as it is.

There is this hint that getting too close to God’s word will change your life.

Staying in an abusive relationship because the unfamiliar future without the relationship is too terrifying.

My own reflection and memory is the fear of what it will cost me to get involved with God, to become a Jesus follower.

What will I have to give up, all the things I like and enjoy, my friends, money, time, hobbies?

None of which are intended to give glory to God.

All the while never considering the joy that could possibly fill my life through a closer relationship with Jesus.

We all have too much of something that keeps us from becoming who God means for us to be.

Letting go of those things seems impossible,
uncomfortable, irrational and vulnerable.

Sara says, “We have too much pride or fear. We
tell ourselves too many lies. We’re just too busy.
All of this builds a barrier to spiritual
transformation.”

This spiritual transformation really begins at your baptism,
in the receiving the Holy Spirit.

Parents are called by the Holy Spirit to bring their children
to the baptismal font.

Adults are called by the Spirit to come.

Child of God, you have been sealed by the Holy Spirit and
marked with the cross of Christ forever.

You underestimate the power bestowed on you at your
baptism,

thinking that the primary gift of this initiation into
Christian community is the forgiveness of sins,

and not realizing that this forgiveness and cleansing
are only the first step in embracing the Christian faith.

The second, all-important step in this initiation is
receiving the astonishing, life changing, world-
transforming, dangerous power of the Holy Spirit.¹

¹ Bartlett, David L. and Taylor, Barbara Brown; David L. Bartlett; Barbara Brown Taylor (2011-05-31). Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 1, Advent through Transfiguration (Kindle Locations 8401-8404). Westminster John Knox Press. Kindle Edition.

John's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins reminds you that personal turning away from evil and toward good is a vital part of your life with God.

Baptism into the name of Jesus is a visible sign of an invisible grace. There is something divinely given to you;

the grace of adoption whereby you become daughters and sons of God.

The power of the Spirit brings you the baptized into God's promise of grace, and participation in the new reality of life with all God's people both now and in the life to come.

How can this not change your life?

The heavens are torn apart and the Holy Spirit descends upon you like a dove.

God says to you, you are my beloved daughter/son.

With you I am well pleased.

Amen