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Truths from the Upper Room

by Vicki Ix

Scripture for Life

One of Jesus' favorite lines is "Peace be with you." He says it again and again in scripture. Actually, this phrase is uttered 14 times by the Lord in the Gospels. We say it every Sunday to one another as we shake, hug or wave across the aisle. What does it mean?



It means that Christ's peace is given to us at baptism through water and the Spirit. That same Spirit is with us throughout each Christian lifetime and abides in the church, in spite of all that would move us toward fear. It is the Spirit of the risen Lord that holds us fast in faith when everything around us feels shaky.

Acts 2:1-11
Psalm 104
1. Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13
John 20:19-23
This Sunday is the conclusion of Easter's 50 days. The season of unabashed joy and gratitude is coming to its end. Although we tend to view Pentecost as a singular, standalone event, it is, in fact, the pinnacle of Paschaltide. Reflecting on the loss of this connection, Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister writes, "But only here in this time, between the bursting open of the tomb and, fifty days later, the overflowing of the Holy Spirit, does the full awareness of what it is to live in Christ, with Christ, and through Christ finally dawn?"

(Joan Chittister, *The Liturgical Year*, Thomas Nelson, 2009).

Contained within today's scriptures is a pneumatology -- a vision of who the Spirit is in the church. The thrust of this feast is Trinitarian, a celebration of the third person in the Godhead in the same way that the Nativity of the Lord celebrates the incarnation of the Word. This third person, though, is more difficult to imagine. Benedictine Fr. Gregory Collins, in his remarkable work of liturgical spirituality *Meeting Christ in His Mysteries: A Benedictine Vision of the Spiritual Life*, writes of the Holy Spirit as "the one who works behind the scenes in the drama of redemption" (Liturgical Press, 2010).

Preaching on Pentecost is, I think, a little like preaching on Easter Sunday. The Spirit, like the empty tomb, is hard for us to get our heads around. But as with the Easter event, there is some wonderful "evidence" left behind, clues that give us a glimpse of the ineffable, the unimaginable. I'm not talking doves or tongues of fire. The Spirit is evidenced by faith in action -- the faith of the first church and our faith today.

We know the Spirit is with us today because the church continues to journey *together* in spite of great human frailty, intractable pride and sexual sin. We know the Spirit is with us because there are still heroes among us who choose justice over law and pay the prophet's price. We know the Spirit is with us because men and women from many nations and faiths hear the same message of peace, compassion and human dignity. Organizations like Church Women United, World Council of Churches and Monastic Interreligious Dialogue testify to the indiscriminate action of the Spirit in our midst.

We also know that forgiveness is integral to the mystery of salvation. At the beginning of his messianic epic, Luke tells us about the forerunner, John the Baptist. In his prayer, John's father, Zechariah, highlights John's role in the bigger picture: "And you, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:76-77).

Throughout the Gospels, Jesus connects healing to forgiveness. He says, "Your sins have been forgiven you" or "your faith has saved you." And in his last breath, Jesus proclaims his forgiveness for the ones who have hung him on that tree.

Forgiveness, freely given by God to us through Christ, is our gift to one another as inheritors of his Spirit. Forgiveness is not an option. If we want to live like the redeemed, it must be our currency in the world. It must be ours because it was his.

Still, in the midst of the hardships of daily life and the suffering of the world, we can feel that peace will never be found. It was easy to feel peace in Jesus' presence, when he walked the earth, I would think. But after the stone was rolled into place?

So his appearance at Pentecost (John, Gospel) was about more than good news -- more than the knowledge that God had raised Jesus body and soul. "Receive the Holy Spirit," he told the disciples. It was the beginning of a new way of God being *with us*. In that new presence is the peace for which we hunger. It is already ours, here and now, if we can only embrace the gift. Creation is unbound now and tending toward completion in the cosmic Christ. Like the disciples, we are living in the days beyond the victory. This new consciousness is growing still. It is our job as disciples to live "as if," to live the hope and joy of the empty tomb here and now.

[Vicki Ix holds a Master of Divinity degree from St. John's School of Theology-Seminary, in

Collegeville, Minn. She has written and given workshops on Gospel living and Benedictine spirituality for more than a decade.]

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