

Come Holy Spirit

Rev. John Allen

This is James. James was my teddy bear when I was growing up.

I bet that a lot of you have some special stuffed animal, or toy, or blanket, that helped you feel safe and comforted.

Its an interesting thing that seems to happen to almost every child. I was surrounded by stuffed animals as a child, I had enough beanie babies to form two separate baseball teams who would play against each other on the floor of my parents bedroom.

And yet no matter how many of those toys came into and out of my life, James was a constant. He was buckled up beside me on long car rides, and in my bed each night.

I am not sure I would have been able to get to sleep without him for much of my childhood.

He was always with me, and always helped me feel comfort.

Today is the Christian holiday of Pentecost. Today we celebrate a day a few years after Jesus' death and resurrection, when the community of Jesus' followers was just beginning to organize into the Christian church that we know today.

Many of those earliest Christians were gathered in a room when a rush of wind blew down from the rafters and suddenly, despite the fact that They all spoke so many different languages, they could suddenly understand one another.

And the spirit seemed to fill them with such enthusiasm and exuberance that most of the neighbors thought it was just a party that had gotten out of control.

It was the arrival of the Holy Spirit. That person of God's identity that stirs our emotions, inspires connection, that warms our hearts, that wells up in our eyes.

All those more visceral ways you experience God's presence, are accounted for by what we call the Holy Spirit.

The Bible refers to the Holy Spirit as our "comforter." I often think of the Holy Spirit as being kind of like that object that most of us felt a unique attachment to as children. The Holy Spirit is God's presence that grounds us in ourselves the way that the presence of our beloved blankets and bears did for us when we were children.

Only the Holy Spirit cannot be forgotten at grandmas, or lost at the park. The Holy Spirit is everywhere, and with us all the time.

In the original language of the New Testament, Greek, the work for spirit is pneuma, it is also meant breath, or wind.

Think of a pneumatic tube. Or pneumonia.

So what we call God's spirit, could also be called, God's wind, or God's breath.

So the Holy Spirit is like that nice deep breath, that you remember to take, the one that gets you back on track, and returns you to a quiet center.

But that is only half the story with the Holy Spirit. Because not all winds are so gentle, and breath is not just a way to calm, but it is the engine for our action.

And the pentecost story, which is in many ways the Holy Spirit's grand debut, is not like that gentle comforting breath named elsewhere in scripture.

Its more like a hurricane.

It disrupts and disturbs. It sets things in a new direction. It inspires and agitates.

The spirit is that invisible comforter, that deep breath of familiar air that centers us, and calms us.

Yet the spirit is also what stirs us up, it is the breath behind the voices of inspiration and change, the air in the lungs of those who fight for freedom and justice. The inspiration of artists.

Both of these things are true of God, and I love that they live so close to each other in this image, this person of the Holy Spirit.

A common line in many of our prayers and liturgy here is this: “come Holy Spirit.” We ask the spirit to come and move in our midst, we strive to have the breath of God move through our gathered body.

And what I have found in my life is that the Spirit can be counted on to show up as often as we pray those words.

But we never can be quite sure what exactly that will mean.

Will we get the spirit of comfort. Or the spirit of restlessness.

Will we be calmed down, or stirred up.

And something I have found in my own life is that the spirit usually shows up in just the way we need, but often that doesn't mean showing up in the way we wanted.

Sometimes the spirit stirs us up into some new direction at just the moment we were ready for a deep breath of calm.

And sometimes when we are caught in our own frenetic fixations, going a mile a minute, looking for the next inspiration, the spirit calms as a pause, a deep breath, that interrupts us from whatever we are absorbed with and reminds us of the bigger mystery we are each a part of.

Truly, God does both.

So its never a bad idea when you are not sure what come next, to just take a deep breath in, and pray “come Holy Spirit, come.”