

## **WORSHIP FOCUS: ‘The Holy Spirit’**

If God’s peace is in our hearts, we carry it with us, and it can be given to those around us, not by our own will or virtue, but by the Holy Spirit working through us. We cannot give what we do not have, but if the spirit blows through the dark clouds, and enters our hearts, we can be used as vehicles of peace, and our own peace will be thereby deepened. The more peace we give away, the more we have.

— Madeleine L'Engle, “*Seeking Peace*”

### **Call To Worship**

Adapted from “*Indwelling*,” anon.

Thou are all replete with very thou  
And hast such shrewd activity,  
That when He comes He says,  
“This is enow  
Unto itself - 'twere better let it be,  
It is so small and full, there is no room for me.”

But, if thou could'st empty all thyself of self,  
Like to a shell dishabited,  
Then might He find thee on the ocean shelf,  
And say, “This is not dead,”  
And fill thee with Himself instead.

### **First Reading: John 14:15-31**

“If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, “Lord, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” Jesus answered him, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’ If you loved me, you would rejoice that I am going to the Father, because the Father is greater than I. And now I have told you this before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me; but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us be on our way.

**Sermon:** “You In Me, and I In You”

I am a little sick of talking about the Pandemic. And since a rest can be as good as a cure, I have decided today to talk to you about indwelling -- about how the Holy Spirit dwells in us, and about how we can welcome the Holy Spirit into our lives. This is a pretty theological sermon, but it has a lot that you can take home. You might have to do some reflection, but it has a lot in it that applies to the pandemic.

Do you remember the Beatles’ lyrics, “I am he, as you are he, as you are me, and we are all together?” I do. I remember them well. I remember the way those words and that song haunted me as a child. The Beatles sing them in a psychedelic pop song, released in 1967, called, “*I am the Walrus*.” It is a creepy song. It takes three different sets of lyrics that the Beatles had not yet set to music, and mashes them together. The juxtaposition of these lyrics is jarring. And, since some of these lyrics themselves are very disturbing, such as, “See how they run like pigs from a gun,” or, “sitting on a cornflake waiting for the van to come,” the effect is doubly disorienting. And then there is the chorus, which just plain terrified me, “I am the egg man, they are the egg men, I am the walrus, Goo goo g’joob.”

I was brought up on Sesame Street. I was brought up on Bert and Ernie and Oscar-the-Grouch singing, “One of these things is not like the other. One of these things just doesn’t belong.” I was brought up to differentiate: to see things and people and ideas as being discrete. As a child of the 1970s, taught by the ‘Me Generation,’ my body was my body, my ideas were my ideas, my identity, and my personhood, were mine.

I remember that, in recognition of this truth, one of the goals of education in the 1970s was to teach the tenets of transactional analysis so that we recognized personal differences and worked towards an “I’m okay, you’re ok,” understanding of each other. This is what psychologists would call a healthy sense of self-differentiation. I was, most certainly, not my friends. There was something about me that was separate from my community. And, people needed to respect my differences, just as I needed to respect theirs, or else. The egg man was the egg man. We were not in some way all egg men. And, the idea that “I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together,” well, that just blew my mind. It was not groovy. It was more than I could fathom.

And yet, as I have grown up, I have come to understand that the Beatles were just as correct as my “Me Generation,” parents and teachers. We are different, and we are the same. I have come to understand that healthy self-differentiation does not actually set up barriers between people. And, as I have grown in age and wisdom, I have come to see that it is the similarities between us that are perhaps the most interesting. That it is our kindred not our personality that is most fascinating. That focusing on our differences is a lonely, bitter, harsh and ultimately unfruitful long-day’s journey into night. And, I have come to see, that in spite of this sad truth, this is the way that much of the world chooses to walk.

When you are nine years old, this is perhaps not obvious. Youth is an egocentric time. Youth is a time when you see yourself as the hero of your own story. People who do not mature, cling to this juvenile idea of self.

I had a secretary once, for example, who was given a mug on Secretary’s Day that said “World’s Best Secretary.” And, her ego was so strong that she believed it. As I worked with her, I discovered that she was impossible to work with because she was the best. There was no room

for improvement. There was no humility. And no sense that she was in any way like any of the other people working in the organization.

There are many people like this. More than you think. Presidents who truly think that they are the best, and cannot even admit that from Washington through to the present time there have been any who even hold a candle to them. Not even Lincoln, or Roosevelt or Kennedy.

Most of us, however, if we have lived a little while, find that this type of egocentricity starts to wear thin. The other becomes more obvious, and our stories start to coalesce and it is hard to say who exactly the heroes and the heroines are. When you have hoped and dreamed, and achieved success. When you have gambled and lost. When you have loved and been loved. When love has not worked out. When you have suffered loss, and grieved. When you have learned French, got the scholarship, made it to Paris, and climbed the Eiffel Tower, and seemingly satisfied your every personal dream, only to realise that on that platform looking out over Paris, everyone there shares a little in you experience. Then, you realize that, “We are not like the other,” and that, “we are exactly like each other.”

Our emotions bind us together. Helen Keller, a truly individual and utterly unique person if there ever was one, once remarked that although grief seems to be personal, and each person’s grief is different, nevertheless, grief gives us entry into a community of people who grieve like us. Grief forces us to realize that we are not alone. Grief dissolves differences between the living.

Grief can also dissolve the difference between here and hereafter. All of us have had the experience of losing a loved one during our lives, and yet, understanding that the person who we loved, who was a different person than us, somehow remains with us. That there is something in us, and about them, that can call them into being, so that we can be comforted by them, whenever we need them. That they are in us. That, “we are them as they are we and we are all together.”

And of course, when we love - when we really love, when we find a life partner - we have those fleeting transcendent moments of experiencing oneness, completeness, mutuality, of being penetrated, seen, and known utterly by another and seeing our beloved, when the barriers dissolve. And all there is between us is our fragile similarity – our need, our hunger, our wonder, and our trembling, fumbling attempt towards ecstasy.

Our reading today from the Gospel of John speaks to the way that, in the space between us – between each other, between ourselves and God, between ourselves and Jesus – the Holy Spirit hovers, as the Holy Spirit did at creation, over the formless void, over the face of the deep, in the darkness. The Spirit that was at the beginning, who will be with us forever. The spirit of truth. And John suggests that this Spirit connects us, and plugs us into each other and to God in a truly psychedelic way, just like the Beatles tell us.

Jesus tells us at the beginning of this reading, that this Spirit, which abides in us, and abides with us, is as close as our breath, always present, always offering us comfort. So important are these words that Jesus repeats the idea a second time – again he stresses this indwelling of the Spirit. He says: “You will see me; because I live, you also will live. You will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.”

Jesus reminds us that the barriers of self can be dissolved. Going away does not mean that Christ cannot come to us. We can have access to him and God and each other through the Spirit. And in this space, suffused with the Holy Spirit, we can find peace. “Do not let your hearts be

troubled, and do not let them be afraid,” Jesus says, “You heard me say to you, ‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’”

“I’m okay. And you are okay.” “I am me, and you are you.” “We are different.” “Let us celebrate our differences.” These are all healthy impulses. To engage fully in these practices, however, we need to empty ourselves, and see the other. To take our sense of self – so replete, so small and full, and crammed with stuff – and empty it. To see the other, and see that they are okay. In this way, we ensure that we receive what the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. This is how we ensure that we know God through the gift of the Holy Spirit.

There is, in the recognition of the other, and the acceptance of the other, a surrender. And, it is this surrender that makes all the difference in our lives. It is the surrender of the war that our egos wage that leads to peace. When we raise that white flag, and let go of our egos, then the Holy Spirit can do its work.

Oh, that we could always do this. As the poem at the beginning of our service reminds us:

But, if thou could'st empty all thyself of self,  
Like to a shell dishabited,  
Then might He find thee on the ocean shelf,  
And say, “This is not dead,”  
And fill thee with Himself instead.