

Lenten Study 2019

Exploring Faith



Workshop #4

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Open with short prayer *(you may use this prayer or your own)*

You may also ask each person to contribute to the prayer by saying out loud in a word or simple phrase whatever they are thankful for, have concerns about or have hopes for.

Loving God, in this time together, we ask that you help us to explore what it means to express our faith and to see our journeys with fresh eyes. Where there are easy answers, grant us questions. Where there are tired stories, grant us imagination. Where there is sinful certainty, grant us holy doubt. Help us listen for you and listen to one another, that we may expand our souls and deepen our understanding, and that we might find rest in you. Amen.

Icebreaker/Open-Ended Questions *(5/10 minutes)*

Allow time for each participant to respond. If facilitators wish to lead the group in a guided breathing meditation, this session may be shortened to allow time.

When you hear the phrase “Holy Spirit,” what comes to mind?

What is your earliest memory or first experience with the Holy Spirit?

Review Small Group Practices *(5-10 Minutes)*

Each person can take turns reading them aloud. Does everyone agree to work with these practices? Any to add?

Guided Breathing/Centering Meditation *(Optional, 5-7 minutes)*

Invitation: In both the Hebrew Bible and Christian theology, the Holy Spirit has been closely associated with the breath (drawing from the Hebrew *ruach*, “breath”). Drawing attention back to our breath can also become a way of drawing our attention to the movement of the Holy Spirit in scripture and in our lives.

Possible models for this activity: 5-minute breathing meditation at [mindful.org](https://www.mindful.org).

Discussion (schedule permitting): What feelings/images arose for you during this exercise?

Scripture and Discussion -- 20 minutes

Have one or more participants read the passages aloud.

Allow a minute of silence afterwards to consider the text before discussion

Luke 3:15-16, 21-22: As the people were filled with expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah, John answered all of them by saying, "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire..."

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Acts 2:1-8: When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?"

Discussion

Some people might respond better if they have time to write their answers first and then give verbal responses. Allow time for writing or thinking about responses quietly.

1. What phrases or images in these passages jumped out at you? Why?
2. Have you ever seen or heard the Holy Spirit depicted as a dove? What memories or questions does this depiction of the Holy Spirit evoke in you?
3. What do you think it means to be “baptized” in the Holy Spirit?

4. Have you heard this story of the Pentecost in your own life? How has it shaped (or not shaped) your image of the Holy Spirit?

5. What does it mean that the Holy Spirit helps us hear God “in our own native language?”

Some Expressions of the Holy Spirit

“Did you know the word ‘conspire’ means to breathe together? Take a breath. Now blow it out again. There! You have just launched a conspiracy. You can hear the word “spirit” in there too – to conspire – to be filled with the same spirit, to be enlivened by the same wind...What happens between us when we come together to worship God is that the Holy Spirit swoops in and out among us, knitting us together through the songs we sing, the prayers we pray, the breaths we breathe...” -Rev. Barbara Brown Taylor, Author



Greek Orthodox Icon Depicting Descent of the Holy Spirit on Apostles and Mary at Pentecost

“I love the Holy Spirit. She is like the wild child of the Trinity, anywhere and everywhere moving, calling forth, and stirring things up.” -Dr. Zaida Maldonado Pérez, Latina Liberation Theologian

“The Holy Spirit is the kind of energy that helps you to be compassionate, to be healed of your ill being...In Buddhist circles, we say very much the same thing to describe mindfulness. To us, mindfulness is the energy that can help us to be there, in the here and the now. Mindfulness helps us to be alive, and since we are there, we are capable of touching life deeply, of understanding, of accepting, of loving. If we continue to develop that energy of understanding and loving, then we will get the healing and transformation that we need. That is why the Holy Spirit is exactly what we call the energy of mindfulness.” -Thich Nhat Hanh, Zen Buddhist Monk



Ethiopian Icon, The Baptism of Jesus

“Come down, O Love divine,
seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardor glowing;
O Comforter, draw near,
within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing.”
-Bianco de Siena (14th Century)

Further questions for Discussion (time permitting)

Some of the traditional themes/images associated with the Holy Spirit include breath, fire, wisdom, wind, and a dove. Do any of these images stand out for you? Why?

The Holy Spirit is referred to with “he,” “she,” and gender-neutral pronouns in different parts of the Bible. What role does gender play in how you understand God and express your faith journey? Where does the Holy Spirit fit in?

The Holy Spirit seems to astonish and surprise us every time she shows up. When was the last time you were surprised by your faith?

Concluding Time

Use this free time to reflect, journal, doodle, sing, etc. in response to today’s discussion and questions. How would *you* express your faith in the Holy Spirit?

Take Home Questions

How has your understanding of the Holy Spirit changed along your faith journey? How has it stayed the same?

How does your expression of the Holy Spirit compare with your expression of God and Jesus?

Close in Prayer *(you may use this prayer or your own)*

Loving God, we have come together to explore our faith and to draw closer to you. Bless us in our Lenten journeys, and help us find time for soulful moments in our week. Remind us of your presence, we pray, that we may sense your constant place in our lives. Turn our eyes and hearts toward the kind of world you imagine. In gratitude, we say, Amen.

Soulful Small Group Practices

(Adapted from Parker Palmer)

Presume welcome and extend welcome. We all lead busy lives, which is why our time together is precious. Know that you are welcome, that you belong, and extend this welcome by your words and actions toward others in the group.

Assume good intention. Each of us has come to this place because we care about our community, its past, its present and its future. Let us join with one another in that common intention.

Come to this work with 100% of yourself. This means three things: to attend as faithfully as possible, to be as present as possible to the other members of the group, and to bring all of who you are – your joys and successes, your fears and failings.

Speak for Self. A helpful practice is to use “I” statements. Share from your own unique story. No individual speaks for an entire group, or a whole profession. This is a space to set aside competition and to celebrate the different ways God works in each of our lives.

Share the air. Pay attention to how much of the group time you take. Every voice is important and no single voice ought to dominate. Make sure everyone has spoken once on a topic before you speak a second time.

Listen to Silence. Silence is rare gift in our busy world. Allow silence to be another member of the group.

If the going gets rough, turn to wonder. If you find yourself feeling uncomfortable with the perspective shared by another, try not to allow judgment to set in. Instead, become intrigued. Ask for more information, and be open to the experience of others. Differences offer us an opportunity to learn from one another.

Observe confidentiality. This is especially important in creating safety and building trust. Vocation is a deeply personal topic, and we hold one another's stories as sacred.

No fixing. Offer advice or reflection when invited to do so, but otherwise avoid the temptation to fix, set-straight, or counsel another group member.

Pray for one another in meetings and between meetings. Lift each other's lives and stories to God in prayer as you leave your time together and through the week until you meet again. This is one of the greatest gifts we can give to one another.

Believe that it is possible to emerge from our time refreshed, surprised and less burdened than when you came. Expect that our time together can provide for renewal, refreshment and helpful perspectives as we explore our faith together.