

Joel 2:28-29 New International Version (NIV)

The Day of the Lord

28 "And afterward,

I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,

your old men will dream dreams,

your young men will see visions.

29 Even on my servants, both men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

Luke 4:16-20 New International Version (NIV)

16 [Jesus] went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, 17 and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

18 "The Spirit of the Lord is on me,

because he has anointed me

to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners

and recovery of sight for the blind,

to set the oppressed free,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

20 Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down.

The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.

Blessing the Table

The Village of Kenmore, I have learned, has many wonderful traditions: celebrating holidays, seasons, local talent, and so much more. One of the traditions into which I was immersed in June of 2018 is "Dog Days of Kenmore." I have not ever lived in a setting where dogs are so cherished and deemed worthy of a local festival. But, that is the tradition here. When I arrived at Dog Days on that sunny and windy Sunday afternoon, I was amazed at the number of people, pets, and vendors who were in attendance, evidenced by my need to park my car 1/2 mile from Mang Park! Upon entering the park, I saw all kinds of people walking all kinds of dogs, visiting the vendors and activities under what seemed like a hundred tents and food trucks awnings. An extravaganza of the canine kind!! At the end of one aisle of tents was the "Blessing Booth" into which I would enter for my role in Blessing the Animals. Now, I am not particularly a "dog person," although I have a general fondness for all animals as part of God's beloved creation. And I do enjoy any furry creature with whom I can share a pet, scratch, or snuggle.

A Place at the Table: "Blessing the Table"

October 20, 2019 ~ Pentecost 19C

Rev. Beckie Sweet

Well, I was early in my arrival at the Blessing Booth, and another of our Ken-Ton clergy colleagues was into her time of Blessing the animals. Seeing the long line awaiting a moment in the booth, I pulled up another chair so that we could both engage in the blessings and move those waiting through a little more quickly. I was there about 50 minutes, and the line never let up! As I conversed with canine and human alike, there was a profound sense of gratitude for each and every blessing. One woman told me that she and Howard (the dog) come to receive a blessing every year, and it provides divine support for them both for that whole year. Another family told me that when their furry family member had been seriously ill during the year, they just kept remembering the blessing that had been offered him, and clung to that hope of God's watchful care.

And the stories just kept coming. Words of gratitude continued. In the 50 minutes of my stay in the Blessing Booth, I offered blessing to over 85 animals and their human families. I received more wet kisses than I could count, and could profoundly feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in the midst of those sacred moments. No creature was exempt from receiving a blessing, for those blessings were offered freely, generously, and with utmost compassion.

The POWER of the Blessings was in the presence of God's Holy Spirit touching us all. That went so much beyond what my words or listening, or scratching or loving could accomplish. For when God's Spirit blows through creation, we humans are simply the instruments of conveyance, while God provides protection, comfort, provision, inspiration, faith, and GRACE.

This worship series, "A Place at the Table," was inspired by our traditions related to the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The first week, we delighted as the children Set the Table for us in preparation for the Sacramental Meal. Last week we spoke of the Invitation to the Table, remembering that Jesus invites and welcomes ALL to participate in the offering of Grace.

This week our focus is on Blessing the Table, which more accurately means blessing the food or elements **and** all those who will receive sustaining nourishment of the physical or spiritual kind. That is a part of The Great Thanksgiving that we traditionally share prior to coming to the Lord's table. And the specific part of the Great Thanksgiving that offers blessing is the "Epiclesis," or Invocation of the Holy Spirit. During the Great Thanksgiving, after we have remembered the purpose of God's creation, Jesus' Last Supper with the disciples in the Upper Room, and stated our faith in the Christ's death, resurrection, and promised return, we hear the Epiclesis, which goes something like:

*Pour out your Holy Spirit on us and on these gifts of bread and juice.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.
By your Spirit make us one with Christ, one with each other,
And one in ministry to all the world, until Christ comes in final victory,
And we feast at the heavenly banquet.*

In both of our Scripture readings this morning, the promise and deliverance of the gift of the Holy Spirit provides life-transforming blessing for all recipients and those who would be affected by the recipients' future proclamations and actions. The prophet

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Joel promises on God's behalf that persons of every age, gender, and socio-economic status, will receive and share God's proclamations.

Our Lukan text takes place very early in Jesus' ministry, shortly following his baptism and extended pilgrimage in the wilderness. Over and over we hear that Jesus received the Holy Spirit, who infused Jesus with purpose, proclamation, power, and direction. Prior to returning to his hometown, Nazareth, Jesus had begun his ministry of preaching, teaching, and healing in the regions of Galilee. Our story begins with a typical event in ancient Jewish synagogue life. As there were no permanent rabbis in the outlying villages, itinerant ones were always welcome. Jesus came to worship as was his custom, and was invited to read scripture (standing, as was the tradition), and then to sit and reflect on that passage. That day, the scroll handed to him was part of the book of the Prophet Isaiah, and Jesus chose the portion we shared today about the Holy Spirit anointing a chosen messenger. After Jesus had read the text, we are told, all eyes are fixed on him.

THEN, as chapter 4 continues, we hear very little about the reflection itself, other than that Jesus said, "**TODAY, this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.**" (Mic Drop!) In other words, this is not history. And, it is not a pipedream for the future. God's promises were fulfilled that very day, in that very Jesus! Who was this Jesus? 'Claiming to BE the Messiah? The folks in Nazareth had watched him grow up. How could he claim to be the Holy One of God?

Jesus was conveying to the hearers that at that very moment, they were recipients of God's blessing. Some were **comforted**. Some were **confronted**. But all had the opportunity to receive and share the blessing of Almighty God. For we see here that the blessing extends to the poor, the prisoners, the blind, the oppressed, and all who were in debt. That was a huge portion of the population! Jesus is essentially telling his friends, kinsfolk, and the congregation, "Look around. See the Spirit of God at work, right here, right now. **God is with us!**" And Jesus, the sign of God's eternal covenant, will be ever active, ever loving, ever liberating, and always present in the Spirit.

Diana Butler Bass states, "And by emphasizing the word 'today,' Jesus transformed Isaiah's words, Isaiah's prophecy, into a powerful invitation for the whole community to act on behalf of God's justice" in the here and now. So, everytime God uses **us** as instruments of "Blessing the Table," ~ for Holy Communion, for a family meal, for a gathering of friends, for a celebration of family love, ~ we are conveying the invocation of the Holy Spirit and its divine support to empower God's work in the world TODAY! The focus is not on the past, or projecting what might be in the future. The emphasis is on how God is interacting with us today.

TODAY, God desires to equip you and me, ~ us all ~ to be filled, inspired, and led by the Holy Spirit of the Living God, who transforms lives to recognize the blessing of abundance, care, and eternal love. Will you let the Spirit blow through you? Will you claim and share the blessings only God can give? Just like Jesus' hometown folk, we are too often reluctant to see God's purpose, let go of our control, and let God blow us to the desired destination. May we be refreshed by the blessing breeze of God's Spirit this day, that through us, God's will may be fulfilled. Amen!