

## Stuck with the Spirit

Isaiah 43:1-7

Luke 3:15-17, 21-22

When I was contemplating the coming of the Holy Spirit to Jesus, I was reminded of the summer when I discovered the art of blowing bubbles — not with the usual bubble mix and a pipe, but with a detergent and glycerin mix and my hands. Have you ever engaged in his kind of bubble play? You have to be okay with getting your hands a little messy — but they'll be very clean!

I heard a story about a family that always brought this kind of bubble mix to the church picnic. It was the highlight of the picnic for many people — and not only the children. One year the bubbles were exceptional. They were bigger and held their shape longer than ever before. The only thing was, when they broke, they seemed to leave a sticky film behind.

One curious person asked the family about the mixture. The mother replied that when they had gone to prepare the mixture as usual, they had discovered that they had no glycerin, and there was no time to run out and get some, so they had substituted corn syrup which seemed to work as well, except, of course, that the bubbles lasted longer, and they “stuck” where they touched.

Those bubbles can serve as an image of the Holy Spirit which can help us to understand the dramatic differences that Luke is heralding in his Gospel.

In the Hebrew scriptures we find the Holy Spirit coming and resting upon people, only briefly, and then departing. There was no expectation that the Holy Spirit “stuck” where it touched. If you cast your mind way back to the stories of King Saul, a challenge since we

don't read about him very often in the three years of the lectionary, but if you can remember the story, we are told specifically that the Spirit departed from him. Even though he was God's anointed, even though he was God's chosen leader for Israel, the Spirit, we are told, was not compelled to remain with him.

But Luke tells us that with the baptism of Jesus there is the beginning of a new age and a new understanding about the presence of the Holy Spirit. Luke is quite specific in his expectations, and he makes it quite clear that this Holy Spirit "sticks" with Jesus throughout his life. For the evangelist Luke, the baptism of Jesus ushers in the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and the beginning of a new age, an age that heralds the beginning of a new relationship with God and with the Holy Spirit.

Luke, like the other evangelists, has John the Baptist tell us about the one who is coming, the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. Then, in the verses which we skipped this morning, John the Baptist is arrested, taken out of action, and thus bringing an end to that old era, even as Jesus ushers in the new.

This is the briefest of the accounts of the baptism of Jesus. Luke gives us no details except one: Jesus hears the voice of God name him as beloved and as Son, and Jesus and those with him see the Holy Spirit descend in the form of a dove.

The new age has begun. From now on, baptism is no longer only with water. It is also with the Holy Spirit. The beginning of the new age is heralded by a new understanding of the Holy Spirit. Baptism and the Holy Spirit are now inseparable. Throughout Luke's writings (remember he wrote the Book of the Acts of the Apostles as

well as this Gospel), we will find that whenever a baptism takes place, there is the expectation that the gift of the Holy Spirit will also be conferred. That's a dramatic change in understanding and expectation.

That's also the beginning of the Good News for us. We are being given the promise, the assurance, the expectation that the Holy Spirit has been conferred upon us, and will stay with us. Each one of us has the presence of the Holy Spirit – not just on our good days, not just when we feel particularly in tune or in touch with our God and our Saviour, but every day. We have been told that we may shed the old expectation that the Spirit comes and goes; that the Spirit may linger for a moment or an hour and then leave us. Luke tells us that without doubt once the Spirit comes, it stays with us. The Spirit “sticks.”

It is when we understand that we too are God's anointed, that the Spirit of God is upon us, and remains with us always, that we can hear the words from Isaiah and revel in their good news: I have called you by name, you are mine. And thus we are invited into ministry, because we know that we have been called by name, anointed with the Spirit and will never face the challenges alone. For the Spirit will never leave us. It will stick with us through thick and thin.

Just imagine what a difference it might have made in the lives of those earlier Biblical figures if they had shared this confidence and understanding. Imagine what a difference it can make in our lives as we face our daily challenges, if we simply take moment and remember that the Spirit of God is upon us: enabling us, empowering us, granting us new vision, stretching us to new understanding, equipping us to cope with all that life brings to us.

It helps us to dare to discern how we will meet the future and the challenges that lie there. Each of us will face our own opportunities and challenges. Each of us will be seeking to discern the faithful way to respond and to develop in our faith and in our lives as a faith community, but they will all share one feature: The Spirit of God is upon us, we have been anointed as we were baptised, and the Spirit will always “stick” with us. Thanks be to God! Amen.