

Problem: Does Holy Spirit make a difference in your reality?

-Comedian Eddie Izzard- "Religion Clip" (start at 3:38).

-It's always good to poke fun at ourselves and laugh a little bit and I (along with many in the millennial generation) enjoy Eddie Izzard a lot. What's striking to me is to compare the story of Acts 2, a story of a spirit-filled church newly formed with amazement, excitement, and real promise, to Izzard's funny overview of a church that is not quite as "spirit filled" (unless you include the Holy Ghost wandering about with a sheet over it's head).

-So where is the Holy Spirit in our church? What does it do? Or maybe a more important question (at least for a lot of people in my generation) is: what difference does a "Holy Spirit" make in my life? Do spirits even exist anyways? These are all questions which the church has not really answered very well as a whole. Thus you get comedians pointing this out.

Solution: Holy Spirit is the blurring of categories and speaking truth to power.

-A friend of mine in college got the opportunity to study at the University of Oslo for a semester. My friend was deeply interested in Norwegian culture and history and was motivated to study more on how so many initiatives of peace came from this culture (such as the Nobel Peace Prize). He took an upper level Norwegian history class at the University of Oslo and when he walked into the room, he was mostly not surprised by the makeup of the class: 90% were very fair skinned with blonde or lighter brown hair and would fall into your stereotypical "Norwegian" stereotype. The professor of the class started the course with a question: why are you studying Norwegian culture and history? To my friend's surprise, a young woman of African descent and dreads named Ida spoke to the class. Her great grandfather was from Ghana and fell in love with her Norwegian grandmother. They later immigrated to Norway in the 1920's. Three generations of her family have lived in Norway and she told the class how she was proud of her Norwegian blood and wanted to eventually teach others about her country's language, customs, and traditions. My friend struck up a friendship with Ida and found that she had only been to Ghana once. "I loved Ghana, but Norway is my home," she told him.

-Ida represents a more common blurring of ethnic and traditional boundaries. What we would think of as a young "Ghanaian woman" actually had more Norwegian blood than Ghanaian. More than we can probably imagine, we commonly run into people like Ida who blurr ethnic and traditional lines all the time: a Native American who is also Irish, a Chinese American who is also Russian, a Somali American who is also Latino. The whole idea of race is one that seems to be more on a spectrum versus one that is clearly defined.

-What is fascinating is that the deeper one goes in many topics, the more you see categories breakdown. Atomic physicists in research of the Higgs Boson talk about

experiencing an utter breakdown of current scientific thought with the search for building blocks of atoms. Linguists talk about this utter breakdown when one tries to figure out the origin of languages. Even in the concept of sexuality, more researchers and sociologists are discovering sexual identity as a spectrum and not as solely defined male/female categories. Blurring of boundaries seems to be the deep underpinnings of who we and creation are. We live not in a world of defined groups and categories, but in a world of spectrum.

-This is where I believe the energy and relevance of the Holy Spirit lies. "In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." (Joel quoted by Acts) The work of the church is not defined by certain categories, but by a Spirit (presence, dwelling, force) that pushes into the surprising spectrums of life.

-The apostle Paul gets at this in our reading from the book of Romans today by saying: "For all who are led by the Spirit are Children of God. For you have not received a Spirit of slavery, but a Spirit of Adoption." Adoption in the first century was not "parenting" like we think of today, but solely focused on family lineage. If you didn't have an heir to pass on your family's lineage, than you adopted someone (always from your same category or class) to pass the lineage on to. The Spirit of Adoption that Paul is talking about through Jesus Christ totally blows this up. All of us, no matter what category we are in, are heirs to God's promise. It is this thing that flows from and into all of us that the church calls the Holy Spirit which makes this possible. All of us, through the Holy Spirit, are Children of God.

Implication:

-Ok, Pastor Eric, it breaks down categories, so what? How does the Holy Spirit matter to the church? How should it matter to me? The Holy Spirit matters because it is one of the only things I know of that can powerfully empower us to hear one another. "Amazed and astonished,(the crowd) asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?" (Acts 2:7-8) This story isn't about speaking (that's what it is commonly thought to mean). It's about hearing. Here was a rag-tag group of Nazarenes, followers of Jesus, whos leader had been killed and most likely were in danger themselves. Yet instead of calling up the Roman guard to pick off this weird group of people at 9am in the morning, the Jewish leaders and members of the crowd outside the house heard something utterly profound and were moved to listen. This is why the Spirit matters. Because when we hear something so profound, so authentic, so true which I believe the love of Christ is, all bets are off. Mountains will be moved, windy paths will be made straight, and peace will come on the entire spectrum of humanity and creation. This is the church and it's mission. We can't do it without the Holy Spirit and radically listening to each other.

-“You call from tomorrow, you break ancient schemes. From the bondage of sorrow all the captives dream dreams; our women see visions, our men clear their eyes. With bold new decisions your people arise.” Spirit of Gentleness, blow through us. Pull down our categories and enable us to listen radically for you in one another. Amen.