

Trinity Sunday/ May 31, 2015

St. Andrew's Episcopal Church  
The Rev. Carenda Baker

A 4 year-old boy was learning to pray the Lord's Prayer. He began: "Our Father, who art in Heaven: ***How do you know my name?***"

I'm wondering: Can you think of an instance in your life when you had at least a sneaking suspicion, or maybe it was crystal clear to you, that God knows YOUR name? That God the Spirit was reaching out to you and waiting for you to recognize this and respond?

All 3 Scripture lessons today point to a ***GOD WHO IS ALWAYS REACHING OUT TO US***. This is an important truth, because we can't really understand much about God without talking about RELATIONSHIP: *dynamic, intimate, challenging, open relationship*. God's core is giving and receiving and sharing love that spills out into the universe and invites us all into it, to a living experience of the One who IS LOVE.

For Isaiah, the Divine One reaching out to him comes initially through a vision of God in the Temple-the Awesome and Holy Other, and he sees himself as a man unworthy to be in God's holy presence ("a man of unclean lips"). But Isaiah is touched by God and purified, forgiven, sent, and given God's words to speak as a prophet. This is Isaiah's call to ministry.

For Nicodemus, God reaches out through Jesus' invitation to adopt new way of seeing, a deeper way of knowing and experiencing God through a living encounter with God in the flesh, the beloved Son who embodied God's self-sacrificing love for the whole world, a love come not to condemn, but to save and restore all creation to right relationship with God.

And listen to Eugene Peterson's paraphrase of Paul's words from Romans 8 we heard: ***"This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike "What's next, Papa?" God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who God is, and we know who we are: Divine Parent and children. And we know we are going to get what's coming to us – an unbelievable inheritance! . . . If we go through the hard times with Christ, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him!"*** (from The Message).

Last Sunday we had a wonderful celebration of Pentecost, with bright and bold symbols on the altar frontal and paraments and clergy vestments, and many of you dressed in red. In the Word read and preached, in the Sacrament of Baptism, and at the Eucharist, we were reminded that the Spirit of the risen Christ lives in us, strengthens us, and is always moving us forward toward new and abundant life. We held live symbols briefly in our hands, and then we released those butterflies - a sign of God's Spirit alive, set

loose, at work in the world – reconciling, loving, healing, empowering, making all things new.

So today, on this Trinity Sunday, we enter into what's called "the season after Pentecost". I like to think of this as the long, green season of growing and learning to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in the world. Most of us need some intentional focus on this, because learning to recognize the way God reveals God's self to us, and what God might be saying to us is an ongoing challenge. It's why we need a community and companions. If you have heard the term "spiritual direction:", this is part of what a spiritual director does: journeys alongside you to help discover what God's Spirit is doing in your life, to help you become the person God is calling you to be.

As Christians, we claim that God is always with us, because God's Spirit, the spirit of the risen Christ has been poured out and actually lives in us. But we forget, don't we, and it's hard to stay attentive to this fact for very long, as we get caught up in the tasks of everyday living. So, I think the Holy One reminds us by revealing God's self to us in very personal ways – ways that speak to each of us as the unique persons God has created each of us to be.

I have 2 such stories to share with you from my own life. Experiences that remind me that God knows me intimately, cherishes me, and calls me by name – Carenda Diane. My hope is that these stories will help you recall your own stories of recognizing God present and active in your life.

Most of you may have probably guessed by now that music is one of the primary ways in which I experience God's presence, power, and love. My favorite hymn is #488, "Be Thou My Vision", which I first learned growing up in the United Methodist Church. The summer of 1989 I graduated from seminary and my home parish, Uriah UMC in Gardners, held a "sending forth service" for me, a service to affirm me and bless me on my way as I began parish ministry with 2 yoked churches in Mifflin County. The planners of this event had done some sleuthing and arranged for "Be Thou My Vision" to be included among the hymns we sang that day.

Fast forward 16 years, to May 1, 2005. I am now at St. John's Episcopal Church in Carlisle, on the day of my Confirmation in the Episcopal Church. My first involvement in the parish of St. John' was joining the adult choir. Again, unbeknownst to me, the choir's offertory selected for that Confirmation service was an arrangement of "Be Thou My Vision". This was especially poignant and deeply moving to me, because earlier in that week I had surrendered my credentials as an ordained United Methodist clergy in order to be confirmed as a lay person in the Episcopal Church. This was the first step required in the long process of what I hoped would be moving toward ordination as an Episcopal priest. It has been a journey of fits and starts, definitely not moving in a straight line on any kind of predictable timetable.

So, fast forward again to July, 2011, 6 years later, and now 22 years after my ordination as a deacon in the UMC. I am on a pilgrimage to Ireland with the youth group and adult leaders from St. John's, Carlisle, invited by Christina Luo's mother, Robyn Szoke, who at that time was the associate rector at St. John's. By this time, I had settled pretty well into my place as an active lay person in the Episcopal Church. I had entirely let go of the desire and actively pursuing the process toward becoming an Episcopal priest. [Barbara talked last week about our trying to control the work of the Spirit, and she demonstrated w/that raspy unpleasant sound on her cello. That's where I had been]. I had finally given up trying to make life go according to my plan. I was at peace, comfortable in my new spiritual home as an Episcopalian. Mark Scheneman, St. John's rector had asked me to bring my guitar on the trip to lead singing for our worship times together. Day 1 of the pilgrimage we made our way to a beautiful place in the mid-eastern part of Ireland in County Meath, a place called the Hill of Slane. If you look at hymn #488, you will see that the tune name for "Be Thou My Vision" is "Slane". The Hill of Slane is thought to be the place that inspired the writing of "Be Thou My Vision", a place that St. Patrick, missionary to Ireland visited. Our group gathered on the Hill of Slane and sang the 3 verses of "Be Thou My Vision", with a pause for reflection after each verse. I knew I was in what is called a "thin place", a place where the line between earth and heaven is extremely thin, almost imperceptible. What followed for me after the visit to the Hill of Slane was a period of confusion and disorientation, and a time of interesting conversation with God - with me doing most of the talking! You see, it was as though, there on the Hill of Slane, the Spirit had breathed on that tiny ember in my heart which I thought had died, breathed on my desire and call to become an Episcopal priest and set it aflame – again. My response? Objection and resistance. It went something like this: "What are you doing, God? I finally let go of all that clergy business! The fire has gone out. I'm finally comfortable living out my days as an Episcopal lay person. It hurt too much to let go of it, and I'm not picking it up again. I don't want my life disrupted. What are you doing?" Over time, through listening and with some sense of disbelief and bewilderment, in the fall of 2011, I met with Bishop Baxter and called together the discernment committee I had met with at St. John's, initially in 2007, to yet again sit with me and explore together this potential call to become an ordained priest.

The Holy Spirit has an infinite variety of ways to "speak our name", because God knows us intimately, and loves each of us uniquely. I have to say: I don't especially believe in coincidence. I tend to believe more in "God incidents".

The other experience of the Spirit's reaching out to me in love was a time when another person spoke simple truth. He was a shy and sensitive 4 year old boy named Noah, who was part of the congregation where I served while completing my Anglican studies year at the University of the South in Sewanee, TN. In early November, 2013, I was driving home from my responsibilities at St. Francis of Assisi Episcopal Church, in Ooltewah, TN., just outside Chattanooga. On the drive home I was involved in a car accident during which I swerved to the left and off the road to avoid impact with another vehicle. In doing so, my car rolled over completely down a slight embankment. Because the car had rolled, I had to be taken out of the car on a backboard, transported

by ambulance to Chattanooga to be checked out. "Somehow" - I never lost consciousness and the only injury I sustained was some superficial cuts on my elbow. And the airbag never deployed! The next week I was not present on Sunday at St. Francis Church. I learned later that Noah's parents had told him about the accident, as the congregation had been told and were praying for me. Two Sundays later when I returned to church, during coffee hour, Noah's father Bruce greeted me. He said, "You know, we told Noah about your accident. We made clear to him that even though the car rolled, you had not been seriously injured. Bruce continued, "Noah came to us last week and said, "I know why Miss Carenda was not hurt in that accident. God was hugging her."

How did that little boy know? When my car finally came to a stop upright, after rolling over – there WAS stillness, and a sort of calm presence in the car, even as I just sat helplessly and in shock, but fully conscious, breathing and waiting for someone to come help me.

"Our Father, who art in Heaven: How do you know my name?" I don't know how, but I believe God does! It is the work of the Holy Spirit to teach us, to help us pay attention so we can recognize the ways in which God is constantly reaching out to us with life and love, with Holy sustaining presence, comfort, and strength to face whatever unexpected things life brings.

In your bulletin, you will find a half-sheet insert that says at the top "Litany of the Holy Spirit". I invite you to sit with this Litany sometime in the coming week. All the phrases listed are ways the presence of the Holy Spirit can be described. Richard Rohr, a Roman Catholic priest in the Franciscan tradition, who wrote the Litany in his book The Naked Now, says it was written "to awaken and strengthen the presence of the Holy Spirit within you". He adds: "Recite it whenever you are losing faith in God or in yourself."

One or more of these images will resonate with you, will shimmer and fall into a "sweet spot" for you. Take some time to sit with it, and let the Holy Spirit be present to you. See what happens. And then, I would encourage you to find one other person with whom to share your experience. Talk about what it was like to be intentionally focused on the Spirit's presence reaching out to be in lively, dynamic, intimate relationship with you.

Let us pray:

*"Spirit of the living God,  
Fall afresh on me.  
Spirit of the living God,  
Fall afresh on me.  
Melt me, mold me,  
Fill me, use me –  
Spirit of the living God,  
Fall afresh on me."*

**LITANY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**

Pure Gift of God  
Indwelling Presence  
Promise of the Father  
Life of Jesus  
Pledge and Guarantee  
Eternal Praise  
Defense Attorney  
Inner Anointing  
Reminder of the Mystery  
Homing Device  
Knower of All Things  
Stable Witness  
Implanted Pacemaker  
Overcomer of the Gap  
Always Already Awareness  
Compassionate Observer  
Magnetic Center  
God Compass  
Inner Breath  
Divine DNA  
Mutual Yearning Place  
Given Glory  
Hidden Love of God  
Choiceless Awareness  
Implanted Hope  
Seething Desire  
Fire of Life and Love  
Sacred Peacemaker  
Nonviolence of God  
Seal of the Incarnation  
First Fruits of Everything  
Father and Mother of Orphans

Planted Law  
Truth Speaker  
God's Secret Plan  
Great Bridge Builder  
Warmer of Hearts  
Space between Everything  
Flowing Stream  
Wind of Change  
Descending Dove  
Cloud of Unknowing  
Uncreated Grace  
Filled Emptiness  
Through-Seer  
Deepest Level of Our Longing  
Attentive Heart  
Sacred Wounding  
Holy Healing  
Softener of Our Spirit  
Will of God  
Great Compassion  
Generosity of the Creator  
Inherent Victory  
The One Sadness  
Our Shared Joy  
God's Tears  
God's Happiness  
The Welcoming Within  
New and Eternal Covenant  
Contract Written on Our Hearts  
Jealous Lover  
Desiring of God

*You who pray in us, through us, with us, for us, and in spite of us.*

*Amen. Alleluia!*

["I composed this prayer litany to awaken and strengthen the presence of the Holy Spirit within you. Recite it whenever you are losing faith in God or in yourself." - Richard Rohr, in his book, The Naked Now].