

# Have YOU Seen the Holy Spirit?

Sixth Sunday of Easter

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John 14:15-21

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Wichita, KS

## Alleluia! Christ is risen!

In a bulletin insert last week and in an e-mail, I asked the question: Have you seen the Holy Spirit? I asked it for a couple of reasons. First, although we have a strong belief in the work of the Spirit, Lutherans are prone to be reticent in trying to identify the Spirit. Sometimes I think we view the Spirit as some mysterious, formless Godhead who is more like that powerful Force in the Star Wars movies than the God who calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth.

But I had second reason for asking the question: I don't think we always appreciate, much less recognize, the Spirit's work in our daily lives. And I wanted you to think it about it: Where do I see the Spirit active in my life and in other people's lives? By sharing your stories, I believe it strengthens us as a community of faith – the Body of Christ – in knowing how each of us has a Spirit-filled experience and by being encouraged by those stories of those who are our brothers and sisters in the faith.

Before I share some of your stories, let me also underscore how our text today helps us see the Spirit. *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments,”* Jesus tells his disciples. *“And I will ask the Father, and he will give you **another Advocate**, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you”* (vs 15-17).

Note two key words in that section I quoted; the words are: “another” and “Advocate.” Simply defined, an advocate is someone who is called to another's side to be a source of help. In modern terminology, we might think of an advocate in the court system, in health care, in an educational institution or even in pressing for legislative action on behalf of a specific cause.

The Spirit, Jesus is telling us, is working on our behalf for a specific cause. And what would that be? Here that other word comes into play. The word is “another.” If the Holy Spirit is *another* Advocate, then that means there has already been an Advocate. And that advocate is Jesus himself.

Here’s the point: At Pentecost, which we will celebrate in two weeks, the Holy Spirit came to the disciples. Why did the Spirit come? To disclose the presence of the risen Jesus to his disciples – to you and to me – to us as the community of faith. And how did he come to you and me? In our baptism.

It was there that the Spirit assured us that we have Christ with us and all his gifts of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. In other words, **the Spirit is always pointing us to – and revealing to us – the risen Christ.**

Think about what that means: Jesus tells us that when we do something for someone in need, we are doing it for Christ himself. When we see an act of kindness, of caring, of contending for right against wrong, we are seeing the Spirit at work who is showing us Christ.

So, have YOU seen the Spirit? Here’s what some of you shared with me and with your fellow believers at Gloria Dei. Some asked to remain anonymous. But all of the stories are meant to be reminders to each of us to be looking for the Spirit’s work – and to be sharing that work with others.

Sometimes the Spirit is a quiet comfort in an individual’s life.

**Muriel Slater** is one such person. She says the Holy Spirit reassures her that when she has failed, there’s always mercy, adding: “I remember that I belong to God.” The Spirit gives her that reminder.

**Janet Janzen** writes that the Holy Spirit often works in her life through Christian friends and family. “He sustains me through them and gives me a word of advice, comfort or encouragement,” she says. “If I’m feeling lonely or depressed, I have several good friends I can call on who will pray with me and for me and who can sympathize. Recently, when I was feeling sad about my children moving far away, one friend, who also has children living a great distance, helped me by telling me how, when she feels the tears welling up, seeks to ‘turn her tears into prayers.’ That word, I felt, was of the Holy Spirit, and, simple as it was, has helped me greatly.”

Sometimes the work of the Spirit is visible in a large group of people.

**Jana Abbott** can name the day and time she saw the Holy Spirit's work: May 5 at 10 a.m. "That's when I joined the Florio family and 600 others in a fundraising walk for Cystic Fibrosis," she said.

**Vicki Vernon** said that a student at the middle school where Michaela works recently suffered a relapse of leukemia. The student needed medical treatment out of state immediately. In one day, Vicki said, the students and staff at this small school donated over \$2,300 to help the family with expenses. T-shirts sold to raise money for the student were sold out in one day.

And then there are those stories that make you stop and simply give thanks.

**One member, who wants to remain anonymous**, told me about her son whose marriage was falling apart. She encouraged him to get back to church, but he wanted nothing to do with it. A year later, he was driving by a church on a daily commute and got a strong sense that he was supposed to start going there. He tried to ignore it, but the message was so strong that he had to go. Since that first time, he's been attending ever since. He met a woman who also attended the church and they eventually wed. "They have built their relationship around a deep-based faith," our member wrote, "and are truly one of the most compatible couples I know."

**Laura Shriner**, who works with female prisoners, relates the story of an inmate named Tina. "Tina was very quiet at our studies," Laura writes, "but finally in an aside she told me she had accepted Jesus as her Savior. She had heard His name, probably as profanity, but now He was real to her, and the light in her eyes attested to that fact." As an aside, Tina is the woman who will be released from prison in the near future and who will receive some gifts of clothing that you here at Gloria Dei have contributed.

**Annette Lindal** remembers when she and Alan moved from Wellington to Derby in 1992. "I had a very hard time saying good-bye—so many close friends and wonderful experiences," she wrote. After the moving van had gone and Alan had taken the kids to stay overnight at a friend's house, Annette was left doing the last pick up of odds and ends. "There was a knock at the back door," she wrote. "My very dear friend from just across the alley was there with her vacuum sweeper in one hand and a carafe of coffee in the other. I remember that evening

as if it just happened — the Spirit was truly present as Mary K and I sat on freshly vacuumed shag carpet in my dining room sipping coffee from paper cups.”

**Sherry Cox** said that about two years ago, she and her husband Jim’s best friends, who had moved to Missouri after retirement, began to pull away from them. Phone calls were not frequent, and when they talked, the woman was harsh and bitter. Eventually her friend told them that she wanted to end communication altogether. “We were taken by surprise and totally devastated,” Sherry said. Even though Sherry and Jim reached out by letter, there was no response – until two weeks ago. The couple’s daughter here in Wichita called to say that her dad had died, and she thought of Sherry and Jim first because she knew they loved him. “We offered to help in any way we could,” Sherry writes. “Two days later, her mom (my best friend) called. I had prayed for two years for God to soften her harshness, and His Spirit was there to get the job done.”

**Valerie Theimer Magana** has so many great stories to share. Here is a more recent one of hers. Working downtown, Valerie said she sees a lot of homeless people. After a major rainstorm, she pulled into a QuikTrip and saw a young man outside trying to dry himself with what he had. “I remembered that I had a couple of brand new blankets in my trunk,” she writes. “I didn't have to think twice to get into my trunk and tear one of them open and offer it to this young man to help keep him warm and dry in the future.”

**Arnold Dilley** recalls when he lost his job. That weekend the pastor’s sermon was also about a man who lost his job and how God opened a door for him. Arnold was rehired in the company’s shoe department, a job that he said he really loved. “This became my vocation for the rest of my working days,” he writes. “The Holy Spirit was at work in that situation.”

Sometimes an appreciation of the Spirit’s work is seen through eyes that are open to the world and the environment in a new and unique way.

**John Buckner** is one who has creative vision for seeing the Spirit. “The Holy Spirit is present in the many creative activities that make life happier and better for the children of God,” he writes. “This certainly includes making art, but is not limited to what we usually think of as ‘art.’” John goes on to say:

“I was asked once, in an oral exam, if air conditioning is an art. Yes. Essentially, all art is high level organization of the environment — sound,

color, ideas, movement, space. Air conditioning organizes temperature, and like all art, can be 'good' art or 'bad' art. The act of organizing the environment is a holy thing," John says, "reflecting a prompting of the Creator."

**Roy White**, who used to volunteer as a representative payee for Dear Neighbor Ministries, helped people with disabilities who couldn't handle money properly. One such person, whom Roy refers to as Albert, an older single man with no known family or relatives in Kansas, would come weekly to his office to receive financial help through Social Security Disabilities.

When Albert became ill, Roy would go by his home and visit with him. One day Albert's landlord called to tell him that Albert had died. With only a \$290 Social Security death benefit, Roy planned to visit funeral homes in Wichita to see if one of them would provide cremation services for Albert. The first one he visited, Lakeview Funeral Home, agreed to do so and also provided an urn. On the day set for placing the urn at Lakeview, Roy asked two of his associates and two Sisters of St. Joseph who were advisors to Dear Neighbor Ministries to attend the inurnment with him. "During this service, there was a very real feeling of being with the Holy Spirit," Roy says. "Still today, I make a visit to Lakeview to be with Albert."

Those are some of the stories you shared. And I thank all of you for sharing your stories, including those whose stories I didn't have time to read. Why tell these stories? Isn't part of the reason we come together as God's people is to encourage one another, to support one another, to express how the presence of the Spirit – the work of Christ – is alive in our lives? Isn't this where the Spirit calls, gathers, enlightens and sanctifies us to be his holy people? Isn't this where the Word and Sacrament empower us to go out in the Spirit into the world to serve Christ by serving others?

Maybe by hearing these stories from your fellow believers at Gloria Dei, your eyes will be open to the Spirit's work in your life and in the lives of people around you. When you recognize that Spirit at work, give thanks to God for his grace, his mercy, and his never-ending presence.

As one man of faith once said: ***"Those in whom the Spirit comes to live are God's new Temple. They are, individually and corporately, places where heaven and earth meet."*** (Retired Anglican bishop N.T. Wright)

**Allelulia! Christ is risen!**