

Baptism of Our Lord (B) – January 8, 2011  
Saint Stephen's Church, Wimberley, TX  
Patrick Gahan  
Mark 1:4-11  
*We Can Be Changed...through the Spirit!*

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My Spirit lagged on Wednesday morning. At 7 AM I sat at the breakfast table with John, our youngest, trying to eat my oatmeal, but thinking more about the moment we would get up from the table and share a tight goodbye hug. When we let go of each other, John, would grab his bags and put 7,148 miles between us. I would stand on the cold gray concrete of our driveway and stoically try to stuff tears back into my chest as John departed for the airport. Later, I realized that I was not alone with these sad feelings. This scene had been repeated amongst so many of you in the parish, as you said your own teary goodbyes at the end of the holidays.

I was comforted, too, by the discussion we shared at the Men's Bible Study just the morning before. The eight of us around the table agreed that we Christians are people of the Spirit. At baptism we are filled with same Spirit that hovered over creation, the same Spirit that fortified David against the giant Goliath, the same Spirit that ignited Elijah to oppose the evil Jezebel, the same Spirit that evoked the beautiful lines of the *Magnificat* from the lips of Mary, the same Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness, and the same Spirit that brought him back to life in that cold, gray tomb. God's Spirit does not change. God's Spirit never wanes. God's Spirit cannot be divided. God's Spirit cannot be diluted. Therefore, the same Spirit that entered Jesus at his baptism was in me on that cold, gray driveway and was aloft with John on that *Turkish Airline* flight. That same Spirit will remain with us in Texas and in Azerbaijan. It forever connects us in ways that a cell phone or *Skype* could never do.

So on Wednesday, for the first time in a long while I realized what the great Jesuit scientist and missionary Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) meant when he said, "You are not a human being in search of a Spiritual experience. You are a Spiritual being immersed in a human experience."<sup>1</sup> Christians are *people of the Spirit*. We inhabit an entirely new dimension of reality.

We should not be surprised that we Christians are living in this different dimension of the Spirit. 2,500 years before Dr. de Chardin, the Prophet Joel foretold the advent of this new age:

*I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh;  
your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
your old men shall dream dreams,  
and your young men shall see visions...*  
**Joel 2:28**

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Milieu Divin* (1957), trans. *The Divine Milieu* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1960)

John-the-Baptist takes up Joel's prophecy 500 years later and declares the great age of the Spirit had begun:

*'The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.'*

**Mark 1:7-8**

And sure enough the predictions came true in that first ever Church meeting in Jerusalem. just days after Jesus departed from the disciples, Luke reports a spiritual conflagration:

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. **Acts 2:1-6***

Like that father realizing through his tears that he was still connected through the Spirit to his son traveling so far away from him, that same Spirit connected all those diverse people in David's Royal City. The Scripture's witness is that we know the Holy Spirit is active in us when we feel that mysterious connection to each other and to the rest of creation. We know the Spirit is active when we hear God's voice, when we are convicted of our sin, and when we feel God's pleasure. Our experience of the Holy Spirit increases only as we mature in the Christian faith.

In the Men's Bible Study on Tuesday, one of the guys explained what it is like to feel this mysterious connection to God. "I never experienced the Holy Spirit given to me until about six years ago. It was then that I began having visions of God's will for my life." That same introspective, no-nonsense man admitted, "I have come to realize that the Holy Spirit is a mirror where we see ourselves as we really are and where, too, we see the sin that is all around us – threatening to diminish us. Before, I was just looking through a pane of sheer, clear glass seeing nothing of my real self and the sin about me."

Another man, who has dealt with significant challenges the past few years, professed a new understanding of himself. "I have been changed 100%. The Spirit within me tells me who I am. I am precious to God." And when he said that on Tuesday, I imagined Jesus coming up out of the Jordan River 2,000 years before, when heaven was ripped open, and a voice declared: "You

are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (**Mark 1:11**). How wonderful at middle age to realize you, too, are the beloved of God. Only the Holy Spirit can whisper that in your ear.

And that same man professed the unexpected way the Holy Spirit pushes us into a life that is pleasing to God and to ourselves. “Don’t think of the Holy Spirit as a friend who meekly asks, ‘Hey, do you want to go out and play.’” No, the Spirit is like your crotchety grandfather who demands, ‘Get out there and play – hard!’”

### Sermon Outline

I. Christians are people of the Spirit

- a. Therefore, we are connected to God, one another, and all creation by the Holy Spirit.
- b. Teilhard de Chardin – “... We are Spiritual beings having a Spiritual experience.”

II. We are living in God’s new age of the Spirit

- a. Foretold in **Joel 2:28-32**
- b. Promised by John-the-Baptist in **Mark 1:7-8**
- c. Experienced by Church in **Acts 2:1-18**

III. We know we are living in the Spirit when we feel connection to others and to God’s creation, when we hear God’s voice, when are convicted of our sin, and when we feel his pleasure.

- a. “You are my Son, the Beloved...**Mark 1:10-11**
- b. “I have realized the Holy Spirit within me, Who is telling me who I am...” (Bible Study)
- c. “Six years ago my baptism came alive within me. I see visions. (Bible Study)
- d. “Holy Spirit becomes a mirror into which we look. We see the evil around us. Before it was just a pane of sheer glass.” (Bible Study)

**Conclusion.** “The Holy Spirit is not like your buddy who says, “Hey, let’s go play.” No the Holy Spirit is like your crotchety grandfather who says, “Go outside and play hard!”