

Fifth Sunday of Easter, Year B, RCL
Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:24-30; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8
April 29, 2018
The Rev. Danée Ashley

<Reads excerpt from *Mary Poppins*> And the Banks children have all sorts of marvelous adventures under the sharp and rather supernatural eye of Mary Poppins. The wind blew her into their lives at just the right moment (their previous nanny had quit that day) and they couldn't control it. I liken that wind to the Holy Spirit – blowing where it will, as it will in each of our lives and our communities—refreshing us, challenging us, and reminding us of Jesus' promise that we will not be left alone.

The most difficult part of embracing the Holy Spirit is that we don't trust it. We can't measure it. We can't grasp it. It operates seemingly by chance and by intuition. You don't know why, but you feel you should go talk to this person or buy something extra from the store or take a new position, only to see the results later. How many of us ignore those nudges because we're too tired, we can't be bothered, or perhaps we are so out of touch, we don't even feel the nudge? The Holy Spirit still moves among us, just as it did in those early days of Christianity, like the story we hear about in Acts, but perhaps we have lost the ability to believe and follow because there are so many other things demanding our attention. It is also scary to make a change or initiate something based on faith.

The eunuch in our story in Acts was so moved by the news of Jesus that when he saw water, all he could think of was being baptized—he had no fear of what would happen because he was so moved by what Philip told him about Jesus. “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?” What, indeed? What is to prevent us from being closer to God? Most of us have been baptized already, but if given the choice, would we do it again, knowing what we know now? Would we choose to abide in God's family where we are called to love and to a faith that is more difficult than easy? Would we choose to have our lives changed forever?

My life changed when I accepted the prompting of the Holy Spirit to come here to you at St. Stephen's. Some of you may know this story, but it has had such an influence on my understanding of God's faithfulness that I want to share it again with you. <tell story of accepting this call>

In the almost four years that we have been ministering together, we've played, we've sang, we've learned, we've even danced(!), and we've also cried and held the Christ light for each other when the way forward wasn't clear. We have hoped and dreamed and healed together—my, how you have healed me with your presence and kindness that felt like God's arms embracing me. We have been the church together. We have also invited other leaders into our midst – all those guest priests – Lucas, Terry, Carla, Mike, Guy, Betsy, Pete— and community leaders like Aaron Scott at Chaplains on the Harbor, who have shared their gifts with us and expanded our knowledge and hearts and our community. I am so grateful for each of them and for how they enhanced our faith together. We have been the church together!

Now, the Holy Spirit is flowing through our lives again—much like the West wind in our Mary Poppins story <read excerpt>. My time has come, as well. The weathervane has turned and our story must continue separate from one another. I have stayed like I said I would and we have had marvelous adventures. What a comfort it is for me to know that we are united by the Holy Spirit. Like Jesus reminds the disciples, “Abide in me as I abide in you.” When we abide in Jesus, we remain in the same vineyard, on the same vine, and even though we will be different branches, we are connected through the deep love of God that connects us to each other. Our epistle says, “God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them...There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear...” We have loved boldly together and are called to continue this love no matter what the future holds. God is with you and with me and in this life that we are in together and in the life that we embark on apart.

We have been changed by our time together and I pray that we all continue to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and remember each other in big and small ways as we continue to be God’s peace, God’s light, and God’s love in this world. I love you all. AMEN.