

Sermon preached by Tom Haynes
St. Elizabeth's, Culver
June 7, 2009
Trinity Sunday – Year B

[Isaiah 6:1-8](#)

[Psalm 29](#)

[Romans 8:12-17](#)

[John 3:1-17](#)

“May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be an acceptable offering in your sight, Oh Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”

When my wife and I were trying for the child who would be our second daughter, we were going to a fertility specialist in Nashville. This doctor was essentially Doogie Houser if any of you remember that show. Every doctor or nurse we ever talked to would tell us how brilliant the guy was. They would warn us that he was young and looked younger than he really was. When we went for our first appointment, the guy looked 14 to me, but he came highly recommended, and he started all the testing.

Not long after we started with Dr. Houser, I was scheduled with some friends to go bear hunting in Ontario. These other guys were engineers for Nissan in Tennessee, and due to something going on at the plant, they had to cancel at the last minute and forfeit deposits. In one of those things that made more sense in 1998 than it does now, Susan and I decided to make this a mini family vacation to the back woods of Ontario. The idea was that dad would hunt all day, and Mom and baby Sarah would hang out at the cabin taking in the scenery and doing vacation stuff.

This plan was made more complicated by the fact that it was in the 30's and 40's the week we were there. The black flies were so incredibly bad, they defied description, and this hunting camp was probably 50 miles from what passed for civilization in rural Ontario. The camp had no phone except a satellite phone that cost ten dollars a minute or something. There was no TV (or reception even). The electricity went out periodically, and it would take them a while to get the generator going. You can see how this would be a better place for bear hunting than a family vacation.

There was another complication as well. About two weeks or so before the hunting trip, Susan said she thought she was pregnant. We ran down to CVS and got a test. The test said she was not, so we called Dr. Houser's office and were patronized by the nurse about how inaccurate the CVS tests are. So Susan went down to the doctor's office to do the same CVS test again, but pay more for it this time. We got the same results. It said she was not pregnant.

“Go on your vacation,” the doctor said. “We will figure this out when you get back.”

So we went to Ontario, and while the test said that Susan was not pregnant, she had all the signs we recognized. As one example, the first whiff of coffee in the morning would make her sick to her stomach. All signs pointed to pregnant. The tests said no.

When we got back from the trip, we went back to the doctor, and the test this time said she was pregnant. The ultrasound said that she had been pregnant all along. I asked the doctor how a fertility practice could miss a pregnancy like this. He said it was a “facinoma.” He explained that was a medical term meaning “It’s a heck of a thing, and I can’t explain it.”

Jesus in this morning’s Gospel tells Nicodemus that “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit is one of those things that is hard to understand. We see the effect that the wind has on trees and water, but we don’t observe the wind itself. The Holy Spirit was described as a wind last week, and Jesus compares the Holy Spirit to the wind this week. There is not a reliable test for the Holy Spirit. We look for signs.

You may remember the Groucho Marx quotation “Who are you going to believe, me or your own eyes?” With Jesus we can do both. We can believe him, and we are to believe our eyes too. There is wind, and there are the signs of that wind. Both are real, and the wind is moving in our lives.

The problem is we want a test for the Holy Spirit. We want to get one at CVS. There are times when we have to rely on the signs we see. Authority does not mean much if it is wrong, and so much of our world looks like a facinoma to me.

I worked with Cordon at the Academies for a couple of years. Cordon was the closest thing we had to what most of us would think of as a “youth group.” There would be food, fellowship, some singing and a guitar. There was usually a short Bible study. I talked to them about gifts of the Holy Spirit once, and the students persuaded me to look at one of the online checklists you can find. You can answer some questions, and it will tell you what your gifts are.

This is a fun exercise, but I am not betting my soul on it. I have had bad luck with tests like this you see. I am going to tell you to look for signs instead. Think of the times in your life when things were more than the sum of their parts. Each of you in this room can think of times when you have had more success than you have had any right to. Some things just work and others do not. I claim that we should look hard for the evidence of the Holy Spirit when they work.

Now I am going to be more specific here. I can think of a few places in my life where God was working very easily. Think of marriage for example. On one level, it is all about a couple, some witnesses, and some promises. If it is more than this though, we may have seen evidence of the Holy Spirit. In the words of today’s Gospel, maybe we have “heard the sound of it.”

In today’s Gospel, Jesus is talking to Nicodemus and trying to explain the mystery of Baptism. Jesus says “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.” Nicodemus replies “How can these things be?”

Baptism is for certain one of those things that is more than the sum of its parts. We have words and water. Jesus tells us “What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit.” The Holy Spirit moves in Baptism, and we only see the evidence and not

the spirit itself.

Last week, I talked about the Pentecost. I talked about listening for the familiar voice of Jesus in all the commotion. We have all those languages, and all the confusion. We have many distractions, but in all that noise, the Holy Spirit is there. We listen, we hear, and we act.

My challenge to you today has three parts.

First, you need to believe that the Holy Spirit is moving in your life. We listen for the sound of it because we have faith that it is there.

Next we need to figure out where the Holy Spirit is moving, and hear what Jesus is saying to us in all the bustle and commotion of our lives. We look for those signs of the Holy Spirit, and I am going to tell you to look for the places you have done good work. Look for the places where things are more than the sum of their parts.

Having listened and heard, we need to do some more of that good work.

This is today's Gospel message in a nutshell. The Holy Spirit is moving in our lives. We listen, we hear, and we act.

There is not an easy online quiz to determine God's will. You remember that series of pregnancy tests that were wrong? We knew what the doctor did not. There was some teaching that Nicodemus the teacher did not understand for sure. We need to trust what the signs are telling us and act in faith and charity.

I have one last image to leave with you as we ponder the “listen, hear and act” message. I like this one because it is a visual.

I'll read from the Isaiah selection: “Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: 'Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.' Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' And I said, 'Here am I; send me!' “

When we listen for God, and we hear his voice, I think the first human reaction is to say “I can't do it. I don't have the stuff. Pick someone else.” Moses told God he was not a good public speaker as you will recall. Jonah decided to leave town.

If God is calling us, He will do what it takes to make us ready. Isaiah tells God he is a “man of unclean lips.” The seraphs and the coal make him clean in a beautiful picture of God's transforming and redeeming power.

Then God asks 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' Isaiah responds 'Here am I; send me!'

So we listen, we hear, and we act. When God calls us, may we have the strength, the wisdom, and the courage to say 'Here am I; send me!'

*I have said these words in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen*