

**"Defining Moments" [Holy Spirit pulling us out of the Mud]
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Please Note: These are notes to a lively speech hopefully more akin to poetry or spoken word than a lecture or academic paper. Physical movement and delivery cannot be captured on the page, but I hope this gives you a glimpse of what was shared in worship.

On your bulletins is a photo of a lotus flower.

This flower has captivated the attention of many spiritual seekers

it is a prominent symbol in Buddhism, Hinduism, and ancient Egyptian religions.

What is so captivating about the lotus flower is that out of a muddy, mucky pond,

the lotus flower emerges, pure and stunningly beautiful.

Egyptians thought the lotus submerged under water every night,

and rose every morning like the sun.

So the lotus came to symbolize the sun god.

In Buddhism the flower is associated with enlightenment

In Hinduism the flower is also depicted with a variety of their gods.

Each of these major traditions find something holy about the Lotus emerging out of muck.

This morning we explore how the lotus blossoms out from the mud

and how we might emerge from the mess of the world.

PRAYER

The world is messy.

Winter snow has come, beautiful as it is,

it has brought about major car accidents in the Midwest

and created a lethal hazard for countless people in need of housing

Paris has realized its worse fear:

its own citizens reverting to extremism

and terrorizing their neighbors in the name of a loving God.

Boko Haram continues to terrorize people in Nigeria

and Pakistan continues to suffer at the hands of violent militants.

We might like to turn off the news,

but we know that messiness lives in our own lives as well:

we ourselves or our loved ones grapple with a debilitating illnesses

or impossible decisions;

we ourselves or our neighbors struggle to make ends meet

or certain relationships are tense;

Even the baptism of Jesus was messy:

John the Baptist ate locusts and wore camel hair.

He decided to spend his days out in the wilderness.

He probably didn't smell so great.

The Jordan river had a muddy bottom and the water probably wasn't crystal clear.

John practiced immersion baptism, so

Jesus got soaked,
his hair was a mess and his clothes did that thing where they all stick together.

Yet as he emerges from the waters,
the Holy Spirit descends like a dove and delivers a blessing:
You are beloved.

The Holy Spirit is key to the reorientation experienced in baptism...

In our second reading from acts,

Paul is spreading the good news about Jesus Christ all around the Mediterranean.

Well, the good news is spreading fast - faster than Paul and his colleagues can keep up with.

So, some disciples only get pieces of the story.

The disciples in Ephesus apparently missed the piece about the Holy Spirit.

They know about John the Baptist and have heard the promise of the Messiah,
but they don't seem to know much about the Holy Spirit.

The writer of Acts says they had never even heard of the HS

(probably an exaggeration, since if they had heard of John the Baptist,
they must of heard John talk about the one who was to come
and baptize with the Spirit)

The disciples did not fully understand what this Holy Spirit was about.

Paul tells them and they have a Holy Spirit moment.

Their relationship with God is forever altered.

They are baptized and begin to speak in tongues and prophecies.

Now, the Bible shares many HS moments -

sometimes the HS moves people to speak in different languages,

sometimes the HS allows people see God in a different way,

sometimes the HS guides people to make a big, life-changing decision.

One way or another, the Holy Spirit irrevocably alters us and transforms our world.

The Holy Spirit nudges us to blossom through the murkiness of our world.

The Holy Spirit draws the lotus out of the mud.

What exactly is this powerful, life-altering agent?

Traditionally,

The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Triune God professed by nearly every Christian.

God the Father created us and formed us as loving parent does.

God in Jesus Christ walks beside us, guiding us and showing us the way, saving us from walking off a cliff and picking us up in the event we do.

God the Holy Spirit, is that divine spark within each of us that connects to the divinity flowing through the world

The Holy Spirit is the thread that connects you to the world beyond yourself.

The Holy Spirit pulls us out of the murkiness of life by connecting us to others,

specifically, connecting us to the divinity running rampant in the world.

That connection has the power to raise us out of the mud,

as the lotus from the pond.

Connection, divine connection, is key for many who make it out of poverty.

Research points to the importance of mentors, devoted and compassionate mentors,
who patiently teach children the skills they need to survive outside of poverty

and these mentors build bridges and relationships that pull children out of poverty.
[Payne's Framework for Understanding Poverty]

On the flip side,
too often children who feel stuck and devoid of meaningful connection are easy targets
for extremists looking for new recruits.

[n.b. not every time and there are other factors at play as well, but..]

The need for a Holy Spirit connection can not be overstated.

As I close, I want to share with you a children's book: "Duck in the Truck" by Jez Alborough
[while in div. school I read this every week for a year when I babysat the cutest little girl]

This is the tale of a duck in a truck a truck that was stuck in some yucky brown muck.

A frog in a bush saw the truck stuck and gave it a push.

But the truck stayed stuck!

A sheep in a jeep comes by:

the sheep gives it a push with the duck and frog. no luck.

A goat in a motor boat comes by.

Ties a rope to the truck, pulls on his motor boat
and the truck flies out of the muck.

From time to time we get stuck in the mud and we need someone to pull us out.

For those of us currently stuck in the mud,

may the Holy Spirit lend us a goat or a sheep or frog to help us out.

may we be open to the love of the HS in a friend, family member, or stranger.

For those of us who happen to wander by someone who looks like they might be stuck,

may the Holy Spirit remind us to throw out a rope or give a push.

may the HS ignite in us the courage to be mentors and friends.

Together, may we be open to the Holy Spirit's power to raise us from the mud and
blossom like a lotus flower.

Amen.