

Sermon by Julie Shires
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The Spirit in Everyday Life

Lesbia Lesley Scott was born in 1898 in London England and died in 1986. She was married to an Anglican priest in the Church of England.

Lesbia Scott wrote religious dramas, often performed as pageant plays in the church. She also composed inspirational hymns for her three children during the 1920s. Many were written in response to the children's suggestions: "Mum, make a hymn for a picnic," or "Mum, make a hymn for a foggy day." One day one of her children asked, "Mama, what's a saint?" Lesbia Scott combined her knowledge of church history with her love for religious drama and wrote the hymn "I SING A SONG OF THE SAINTS OF GOD" which we sang moments ago.

In Christian tradition, a saint is a person who is recognized as having an exceptional degree of holiness, likeness, or closeness to God. For example, we celebrate St. Francis and his love animals, and St. Nicholas and his concern for children. However, the use of the term saint can vary depending on the context and denomination. For example, many Christians, including Episcopalians, regard all of their faithful deceased to be considered saints. Some Protestant denominations saint refers broadly to any holy Christian.

The road to sainthood, extraordinary as it is, is paved with ordinary steps, everyday people being faithful and obedient to a calling. One of the roles of the church is to offer many opportunities to deepen the relationship with God. We meet weekly for the eucharist. We celebrate Easter and Christmas. Some churches have revivals, offer seminars, classes church camps. In today's sermon I will talk about baptism by water and baptism by the Holy Spirit.

Father Rob has given an excellent sermon about baptism in the church. He pointed out that baptism was practiced in the Old Testament. It is a symbol of repentance and forgiveness. John in the book of Luke was offering baptism and people flocked to him. Some thought he was the Messiah, so John carried some celebrity status. John makes it clear that he is not the Messiah, but there is one coming who is. John says "I am not even qualified to lace his tennis shoes."

Jesus shows up for baptism just like anybody else. Except that Jesus isn't just anybody else. If Jesus is the Son of God and without sin, why would he need baptism for the forgiveness of sin?

In the Matthew 3 story of baptism, there is an awkward exchange between John and Jesus. But John clearly sees that Jesus is special, and tries to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness."

On this point, most theologians agree: Baptism in this case announces God's favor and establishes Jesus' identity as the Son of God.

This marks the transition of baptism by water to the indwelling of God in our lives through the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The sidebar on page 7 of your bulletin talks about this [READ SIDEBAR]

Have you ever seen the Holy Spirit? Probably not, at least not Bible descriptions of tongues of flame (Acts 2) or a freely blowing breeze (John 3). That's what makes preaching on the Holy Spirit so difficult. You, like me, may have received mixed messages about the Holy Spirit.

I attended Baptist churches in North America when I was a young girl. There was a lot of emphasis about the Holy Spirit and receiving spiritual gifts.

Spiritual gifts or charism where we get the word "charisma", is an extraordinary power given by the Holy Spirit, outlined in 1 Corinthians 12. These gifts are given by the Holy Spirit to individuals, but their purpose is to build up the entire Church. These abilities, often termed "charismatic gifts" contain some of the more unusual gifts, such as the gift of healing, the gift of miracles, and speaking in tongues.

As a young girl, it both fascinated and scared me. I heard about faith healers like Kathryn Kuhlman and the popular Benny Hinn. In his ministry Hinn provides faith healing, sometimes called the "slaying of the Spirit". It can be described as prostration in which an individual falls to the floor while experiencing religious ecstasy. Believers attribute this behavior to the power of the Holy Spirit.

I never liked the idea that I might fall over involuntarily and faint onstage. I was quite certain that I didn't want to speak in tongues, and religious ecstasy that looked like a seizure, like a condition that requires medical attention.

These gifts are believed by followers to be supernatural graces. It is distinguished from the graces given for personal sanctification, which refers to a person becoming holy.

Where do you see yourself in these stories? Are you at the Jordan river, watching celebrity prophet John the Baptist to see if he is the Messiah? Are you waiting to be baptized for the forgiveness of sin? Or in the book of Acts, have you been baptized and awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit?

How are we to interpret the Holy Spirit at work in the readings of Luke and Acts?

We don't see tongues of flame or random winds. One pastor said some of search for the Holy Spirit like fishing enthusiasts who inquire where the fish are biting and what bait is working. We flock to those books, retreats and ideas for an encounter. The holy spirit is a mystery.

Understanding that Holy Spirit is here for our sanctification, for our personal journey to holiness, is a great comfort to me. Those blessings, such as the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit are found in Isaiah 11 and include wisdom, understanding, counsel, piety, and fear of the Lord. We are more familiar with the fruit of the Holy Spirit found in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, forbearance, and self-control.

If that personal journey sanctification follows in the steps of Christ, it allows us to experience those gifts. In fact, we have probably seen the Holy Spirit on countless occasions. Anytime someone stands up for another person. Anytime someone follows the footsteps of Jesus. Anytime one bears the love of Christ to another, we've seen the Holy Spirit.

I think the composer Lesbia Scott would have agreed with this. The encouraging message of her hymn is that sainthood is within reach of anyone who courageously tries to do the right thing. Wherever we may find ourselves in our daily lives performing mundane tasks at work or at

home, or if we posture ourselves to be involved in our local communities, we are called to be brave in what we believe and push beyond our fear. A few of us may even be called to be saints.

Whatever our path, we have assurance that the Holy Spirit is present and can be found in remarkable, courageous and generous people all around us. Keep your eyes open. You might even see one in the mirror.