

*Joshua 24:1-3a; 14-25/ Galatians 5: 22-23a
26 Pentecost / Proper 27 / Year A
9 November 2008
Preached by the Rev. David A. Fredrickson*

Yesterday afternoon saw the conclusion of yet another diocesan convention, the 223rd, convention of our diocese. The two day event was good and hopeful. We had as our guest the Right Reverend Suheil Dawani, Anglican bishop of Jerusalem and his wife. Bishop Dawani's diocese has 27 parishes that are located in 5 different countries or regions: Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Palestine, and Israel. His ministry extends to over 7000 Anglicans that worship in the most contentious and violent part of our world and yet he came with such hope and enthusiasm for the work of the gospel in that part of the world. It is not exaggeration to say that we were all inspired when we heard the story of what is going on in his diocese. One of the reasons our diocese brought Bishop Dawani here was so that he could share his story with us. But that is not the only reason, he was also brought here so that we could share our story with him and continue to pledge our support for his diocese and all the Christians that live in that difficult part of the world.

Following Bishop Dawani's lead, in both of his meditations, our own bishop, Bishop Tom, encouraged each of us to examine how the Holy Spirit has been present in the life of our own parishes and in our own individual lives. For 45 minutes yesterday afternoon, both lay

and clergy alike, shared with the whole convention stories of how the Holy Spirit has been moving and shaping their parishes and their lives. That too was truly an inspiring time. Many of the stories people had to tell were simply amazing and wonderful and this was good for Bishop Dawani to hear. The Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, that part of the Trinity that is most often forgotten and misunderstood, it seems is alive and well across the globe, whether it be in the holy city of Jerusalem or the neighborhoods of Natick, Cambridge, or Wareham.

During Bishop Tom's second meditation at the Eucharist, he talked about the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit found in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and expounded upon by St. Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*. Through an ancient prayer that the bishop recited to us, he identified these seven gifts and then said something very profound. First the prayer:

O Lord Jesus Christ, Who, before ascending into heaven, didst promise to send the Holy Ghost to finish Thy work in the souls of Thy Apostles and Disciples, deign to grant the same Holy Spirit to me, that He may perfect in my soul the work of Thy grace and Thy love. Grant me the Spirit of Wisdom that I may despise the perishable things of this world and aspire only after the things that are eternal, the Spirit of Understanding to enlighten my mind with the light of Thy divine truth, the Spirit of Counsel that I may ever choose the surest way of pleasing God and gaining Heaven, the Spirit of Fortitude that I may bear my cross with Thee, and that I may overcome with courage all the obstacles that oppose my salvation, the Spirit of Knowledge that I may know God and know myself and grow perfect in the science of the Saints, the Spirit of Piety that I may find the service of God sweet and amiable, the Spirit of Fear that I may be filled with a loving reverence

towards God, and may dread in any way to displease Him. Mark me, dear Lord, with the sign of Thy true disciples and animate me in all things with Thy Spirit.

What is so profound about these seven gifts is that we all have them, each and every one of us and by having these gifts we have everything that we need to live a life of faith and spread the gospel, the good news, to all who we encounter in our daily lives. That is profound, but that is not all.

In the early going, it was difficult for people to talk about the Holy Spirit. It seemed much easier to talk about God the Father or Jesus the Son. For most, talk of the Holy Spirit was nebulous and foreign. So Bishop Tom asked, “How do we recognize the Holy Spirit in ourselves or others? In looking at this question with us, he made reference to Paul’s letter to the Galatians chapter 5 where Paul describes the fruits of the Spirit. “The fruit of the Spirit is [Paul says] love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Tom read the scripture and then he looked up, “Wherever and whenever you see any one or all of these fruits in the people you encounter, you are in the presence of the Holy Spirit right then and right there.” It is important to go up to these people, he said, and connect. But it is also true that whenever, we encounter any or all of these fruits in ourselves, we need to take stock of that and explore and pray with that part of us, for it is there where we will encounter

the Holy Spirit within. The trick is to dwell there, live there, look for these fruits both within and out there in the world and know that by encountering the Holy Spirit, we will find those gifts necessary for a faithful walk with Christ.

Bishop Dawani was such a powerful example to us as a person of hope who seeks out the Holy Spirit in the midst of a life filled with the threat of constant violence in his church and in his life. For him and the Christians in that part of the world, looking for the fruits of the Spirit is a matter of survival. I urge all of us this morning to take heed and put ourselves, particularly in these troubled times and in our own troubled places, to look for the Holy Spirit within and without and go into the presence of the Holy Spirit whenever and wherever we can. Take refuge and look around and know that God is at work always, never failing, to lead us to himself.

In Jesus Name; Amen.