

Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, May 19, 2024
"Come Holy Spirit"

Young at Heart Message

Has there ever been anything that other people have insisted exist, but you've never seen it, so you just aren't convinced that it's real?

For example, some people adamantly believe in the Sasquatch – aka Big Foot or the Yeti.



Other people strongly believe the Loch Ness Monster exists – lovingly referred to as "Nessie."



Of course, none of us have actually ever seen these things, and there's little if any actual proof of them.

And yet, there are people who strongly believe they exist anyway.

There is something that I am convinced doesn't actually exist in the wild, but Canadians everywhere will tell me they do.

Can you guess what it is?

Moose.



I am utterly convinced that they don't actually exist. I've seen moose in zoos, but even then, I wonder if they're real.

I have traveled out to Montana more than 8 times, and I've stayed on a property where, every year, they tell me a mother and her baby walk through.

And I still have not seen them.

I've traveled throughout the western US where moose supposedly frequent, and nothing.

My sister and I just traveled to Jasper for a night, and we saw a bear walking along the highway...



We saw bighorn sheep chilling along the road.



We saw several deer, and we also saw these baby crows hanging out in a nest in a canyon...



But, we still didn't see a moose.

I'm further convinced by the fact that my colleague, Aaron, who moved up here several years ago now and serves Millwoods in Edmonton, has also never seen a moose.

It's starting to feel like Canadians just tease those of us from the US by saying they're real just to get us up here, and then we're let down when we realize they don't exist.

There are some things that one just feels like they need to experience themselves in order to fully understand the reality.

I think moose are just one of those things.

To me, they are the unicorns of Canada and unless I see one for myself, I simply can't believe they exist.

Now, my irrational lack of belief in moose might seem silly, but there are plenty of people who aren't convinced of the existence of the Holy Spirit either.

And, the Holy Spirit isn't necessarily something that can be seen with the naked eye.

The Holy Spirit is a presence, a feeling, a knowing that is beyond explanation. So, it makes sense that it would be difficult for some people to believe the Holy Spirit is real.

The Message

Today is Pentecost – the commemoration of the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Mary, mother of Jesus and the Apostles of Jesus while they were in Jerusalem celebrating the Feast of Weeks, as described in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:1–31).

In the scripture reading we heard today, Jesus told his disciples that the Spirit would be sent to them, but it could not come to them until after he was gone.

And, I imagine the disciples were a little bit like “yeah, sure Jesus... we won't believe it until we see it.”

Kind of like me when it comes to moose.

I won't believe they exist until I see it with my own eyes, either.

And yet, there's something to be said for believing something on faith, too.

Now I actually think it's true that the disciples didn't believe Jesus when he said he'd send the Spirit.

Or perhaps they did, but they had no idea what that experience would be like until it happened.

And then there's the realization afterwards that the experience of "a noise from heaven like the sound of a mighty wind," and "fiery tongues moving in all directions" was in fact the promise of the Holy Spirit that Jesus talked about.

Most of the people experiencing this were simply confused, and they even mistakenly thought people were drunk.

It wasn't until Peter reminded them of the prophecy that people started to realize maybe this experience was what Jesus had promised.

It didn't look anything like they expected, but it was happening right before their eyes nonetheless.

I have found my personal experience with the Holy Spirit to be rather mysterious and difficult to explain as well.

It certainly isn't as obvious as the experience described in Acts, so I can understand why some people struggle to believe in the Holy Spirit because it isn't typically something that can be detected with our standard senses.

I have had challenging times in my life, and I have also had times which required heavy discernment and decision-making.

And in those moments, I have struggled to see or hear or feel the Spirit guiding me.

When facing the challenge or the decision head-on, I have found it difficult to determine exactly where and how the Spirit is moving in my life.

I have experienced moments when I feel utterly alone – as though no one in the world will understand what I'm going through, and I have nowhere to turn.

But when I look back on those difficult times from a future point in time, I can far more easily see how the Spirit guided me through those challenges.

I couldn't see it in the moment because I had been overcome by despair and the negative self-talk that tends to happen when we feel alone, or like the world is out to get us.

Part of the reason it can be harder for me to see the movement of the Spirit in the moment is because it doesn't always look the way I expect it to look.

The way I expect things to work out is often not the way they actually work out.

So then I find myself wondering if the Spirit was really there, or if I muddled my way through it on my own, relying on what I would call “gut instincts” instead.

As I move forward in my faith journey and in life, I have learned to trust that even if I am not sure in the moment what path is the right path, the Holy Spirit is guiding and moving in my life.

For me, it isn't about needing tangible proof that the Holy Spirit exists.

It's about trusting that it exists despite not being able to see or feel or touch it.

So, perhaps I should also trust that moose really do exist?

I'd still like proof, but I suppose if I am going to stand here and tell you all that the Holy Spirit exists, I should also believe that moose exist based on the experiences of others.

And, there is something to be said for trusting in what we might call our “gut instincts” – perhaps that's one of many ways the Holy Spirit speaks to us and guides us through our lives.

So, as you leave the sanctuary on this Day of Pentecost, may you feel the presence of the Holy Spirit moving in your life.

May you lean into the Holy Spirit as it moves and guides you throughout your day, and may you become aware of the ways the Spirit touches your life in small ways and in big ways. Amen.

Let us pray:

Holy One, For all of the ways you speak to us – in rushing wind, in dancing flames, in words we understand, and in all that transcends language, we give thanks.

Give us courage to speak your love, everywhere we go, to everyone we meet. Amen.

~ Prayer written by Joanna Harader, and posted on **Practicing Families**. <http://practicingfamilies.com/>