**[1]** Pentecost Sunday, **June 8, 2025**
Sermon Title: “Shekinah: Presence of God”
Scripture: 2 Peter 1:16-19
Theme: This is the 2nd in a 3-series sermon on the Holy Spirit. In this one, we explore the theological implications of Presence (Shekinah)

**[2]** This is the 2nd in a 3-series sermon on the Holy Spirit.  Last week, we explored the Spirit of God as the Holy Creative Breath of God, the life-giving power of God.  The Spirit of God prays with us and through us, groaning and sighing with us in the most exhaustive of moments or the most beautiful of moments.  Today, we will explore the abiding Spirit of God, the Presence of God, the Holy Spirit as Comforter. When Luke
**[3]** describes Simeon as a righteous and devout man, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, the term we translate as ‘consolation’ is the Greek word ‘*Paraclete*,’ otherwise known as the Holy Spirit. We could just as easily translate the word as ‘comfort,’ the comfort given at a time of disappointment or loss.  Luke even helps us understand the word, when he adds that the ‘Holy Spirit’ rested upon Simeon in his anticipation of the ‘comfort’ or ‘consolation.’ (Luke 2:25).  I think this implies something important, that when we even think forward to a time when our sorrow will be comforted, even when we anticipate a coming of comfort, we begin to receive that comfort.  The Holy Spirit rests upon us even as we begin to pray for the comfort that it will bring.  But, finding comfort is often a long process, and a process that is unique with each one.  The Holy Spirit comes to us at the beginning of our need for comfort and abides with us through the entire journey, all the ups and downs, backwards and forwards of each step.  The Psalmist writes: “When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, when the cares of my heart overwhelm me, Your comfort and consolations, O God, delight my soul.” (Ps. 94:19).   “Weeping may linger through the night, but joy comes in the morning.” (Ps. 30:5).  The prophet Amos reminds us that the Divine One who made Pleiades and Orion [in the heavens] also “turns the shadow of death to the morning.” (Amos 5:8).  Isaiah declares that “sorrow and sighing will flee away” and “everlasting joy will settle on your heads (Is. 51:11).”

**[4]** The Holy Spirit is a Comfort-in-Process, not a Completed-Closure arriving all at once and right away; the Comfort grows, in no small part, out of the abiding Presence.  In theological language, we call this abiding Presence, the Parousia of God.  Parousia is both the presence, the being-beside, of God, but also the prospect of the physical arrival of God, the anticipation of God’s Coming.  So, Parousia has been extended in meaning over the years to refer to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.  But, I think it has meaning in both venues, both the yet and the not-yet, of Christ’s coming.  The Parousia of God extends from today into the future when God’s coming again in Jesus Christ will be all-in-all.  As we look forward to the full comfort of God, we can feel comforted in the anticipation of its fullness.  We make joy complete when we take comfort in God’s love, having the same love for others, and partner in fellowship (*koinonia*) through the Holy Spirit (Phil. 2:1).

**[5]** The Apostle Paul writes:  “As we struggle through our temporary affliction, day by day, so too an eternal glory develops, day by day, that “far outweighs our troubles.” (2 Cor. 4:17).  I really think that Paul’s use of the word “glory” here is NOT by accident or co-incidence.  His choice of words is significant.  The eternal glory outweighs our troubles on every scale. As a way of explanation, the Hebrew word for ‘glory’ comes from the primitive word, *kabo*, meaning ‘to be heavy.’ God’s essence is heavy with goodness and grace, heavy with abundance, heavy with caring and with compassion, heavy with comfort and consolation.  When Peter refers to the ‘Majestic Glory’ he has seen on the Mount of Transfiguration, (2 Peter 1:17), he is referring to that Glory which is full of heaviness, a Glory which is wonderfully sublime, awesomely majestic, full of grace and beauty, full of eternity.  As Paul says, a glory which far outweighs our troubles and afflictions, our sorrows and griefs.  We traditionally call this ‘heaviness’ the **[6]** Holy Spirit, in First Testament terminology, the Shekinah. This ‘heaviness’ that outweighs our trouble is likened to a “nurturing and protecting Shadow” of God (Mark 9:7; Matt. 17:5; Luke 9:34). This shadow is a reference to the “overshadowing cloud” of the Transfiguration, and is linked to the ‘pillar of cloud’ which stood over the doorway to the Tent of Meeting (Deut. 31:15), a cloud that both led them and followed them through the wilderness (Ex. 13:22; 14:19).  The Shadow of God, Shekinah, is both a guide and a protector for the people.  The Shadow of God, connects to the Majestic Glory, which far outweighs all our troubles on every scale. Furthermore, Shekinah is a feminine noun in the Hebrew language expressing the Comforter of God, the Holy Spirit of God, as Guiding, Nurturing, Comforting, Overshadowing, Consoling, Protecting and Compassionate—aspects of the nature of God.  And these are qualities that can identify any Christian, regardless of gender.

We are familiar with the words spoken to us during our grieving: “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who revere the Divine.” (Ps. 103:13).  “As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.” (Is. 66:13).  The Apostle Paul writes: “the Father of mercies consoles us in our troubles, so that we may be able to console others in their troubles, with the same comfort by which **[7]** we ourselves are consoled by God. (2 Cor. 1:4).  As God reaches out to us in comfort, we may also share our comfort with others.  In the Book of Acts, Luke describes the early church in Judea, Galilee and Samaria as “living in the reverence of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:31).  The state of the church was described as “growing in peace,” by its participation in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.  Comforting, and being comforted by, one another, the church increases its influence and spreads its peace to other parts of the ancient world. When people grieve well, it is no secret, even today, that other things in life go well also.  Peace in the world is forever linked to the Comforter, to the good grieving of people in the world.

**[8]** At one point, the prophet Jeremiah says: “My sorrow is beyond healing. My heart is faint within me.” (Jer. 8:18).  There was no comforter present for Jeremiah; no one to restore his soul, no one to ease his pain, no cure for his grief.  His eyes were dim (Lam. 5:17), he says.  In the terminology of the prophets, he “grieved the Spirit,” in his lamentations.  To grieve the Holy Spirit is to mistreat or abuse the Spirit.  To grieve the Spirit is to literally ‘carve up’ the Spirit so that the wholeness and integrity of the Spirit is no longer present.  Jeremiah’s heart is shattered in his grieving; no longer strong within him.  Part of spiritual healing is to find a restorer for your soul, a Comforter to ease your pain.  Jeremiah looked for a redeeming Spirit, but could not find it in the faces of his people, much less in his own face.  Jeremiah needed a Spirit of wise counsel, to advise him on a spiritual path, to guide him with a wise plan, a plan not just for himself, but also for the people of God.

Walter Bruggemann writes: “Popular, easy, reassuring religion imagines God’s constant attentiveness to us. But we know better. We know that to live in God’s world is to live being abandoned, to face free-fall and absence and aloneness that go all the way to the bottom of reality. The Friday call of Jesus calls us to relearn faith and obedience and discipleship.” The Psalmist writes: How long, Lord/ Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? (Ps. 13:1) but the Psalmist also writes: “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I rise on the wings of dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. (Ps. 139:7-12)

**[9]** John Swinton explains this a bit more, in his book *Finding Jesus in the Storm.* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdsman, 2020). “When you have experienced the abandonment of God, when your cries into the night have gone unheard, your trust in God shifts, it doesn’t disappear, but it does change. No longer do you expect God to come racing in to save you. You still believe that all will be well in the grander scheme of things, for now, the presence and absence of God need to be held in a creative tension.” The author quotes John Colwell: “Faith is trusting God in the darkness, it is not a quasi-magical means of turning the darkness into light. It is not that I don’t believe God can and does do that, but for the here and now, God calls us to trust even in the darkness. Faith is not a magical power or a feeling …. It is a settled trust in God even in the continuing darkness and silence, even when we cannot see or hear.” (John Colwell, *Why Have You Forsaken me?* 2014).

**[10]** I think Jesus chooses his words carefully, when he promises to send a Comforter to repair our broken hearts and calm our anxieties.  With Jesus, there is no sorrow beyond healing, no broken-ness that cannot be mended.  Jesus provides the redeeming Spirit that we need, that Jeremiah needed.  Jesus sends us the Comforter and the fellowship that leads us into restoration, the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God lifts our faces to the forgiveness of God and she/he wipes away our tears in the holiness of God’s grace.  Wise One, Spirit of Truth, Guider of Destiny, Come and Redeem us today!  Alleluia. Amen.