

Sermon *The Indwelling (Shekinah) Spirit of God Lives In You*  
The Very Rev. David J. Marshall, All Angels 5.10.26

*Mother's Day.*  
Acts 17:22-31  
1 Peter 3:13-22  
John 14:15-21  
Psalm 66:7-18

Let me ask you a question: If I asked you to point to where God is, where would you point? We are conditioned to point upward towards "the heavens" to indicate that God is up above us. Some point to the altar or the Church as the place where God is. When I've asked this to a group, there is always someone who points all around the room (which I appreciate). If you were to ask me, I'd point to the inside. I believe that God dwells within. God also is up, and around, and in the Church and in each one of us. But, for today, let's focus on the indwelling Spirit of God.

I believe in the indwelling Spirit of God for many reasons, one of them being today's Gospel lesson from chapter 14 of John's Gospel. In this amazing chapter, Jesus has gathered his disciples for what we call the Last Supper. In his final discourse with them, Jesus said this in verse 15-17:

*"If you love me, you will keep my commandments, and I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to be with you forever.  
This is the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you and he will be in you."*

He will be in you is the part that I'm focusing on today.

One of the themes of Chapter 14 (and the theme of the Easter season readings) is people interrupting Jesus. In the beginning of the chapter, Jesus says, "And you know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas interrupts Jesus and says: "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" This prompted Jesus said to him, "I am the way and the truth and the life. Then Philip interrupted and said to Jesus, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied."

A couple of Sundays ago we had Good Shepherd Sunday. From John, chapter 10, Jesus said *the shepherd of the sheep call the sheep by name and he leads them out*. John points out that they didn't understand what he was saying; so, Jesus said: *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

Going back to today's Gospel, Jesus said: *the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him because he abides with you and he will be in you*. In my mind's eye, Jesus said this and then paused. There were no interruptions. They understood this part. He then went on to talk about the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, who is coming to them when he departs. I was surprised, frankly, that there were no interruptions with the phrase "the Spirit will be in you". That tells me they understood the indwelling Spirit.

But why did they understand it? To answer that question, I first looked into Jewish faith and life of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The Hebrew word is “shekinah” (shuh-KEE-nuh). It means the indwelling, settling and abiding tangible, manifested presence of God on earth among the people. Often symbolized by light, fire or a cloud, it is the dwelling presence of God within and around us. When Jesus said: the Spirit of truth will be in you, I think they understood it to be shekinah.

The second thing I did was to see if Jesus ever talked about shekinah before. I think he did. To explain it, I’m going to ask you to consider reading the Lord’s Prayer differently. I’d like you to think about the prayer (sometimes called the Our Father), in terms of shekinah. To start, shekinah is considered to be a feminine spirit. Jesus referred to God as “Father”. In order to be a father, there has to be a mother. Likewise, the shekinah is a feminine Spirit of God. Jesus said, “I am going to the Father” and, as such, the Mother – shekinah – will be with you. The mothering Spirit of shekinah has an aspect of orderly household management. As the Father goes out, the Mother orders the household and the children. Did your mother make sure you were ready and prepared to go out of the house for school? Did your mother remind you to wear a clean shirt? Did she say to act accordingly out in public to make the family look good? (Or, don’t misbehave and make your mother look bad) Take that notion and add it into Jesus’ opening line: *If you love me you will keep my commandments*. In the household of my childhood, we showed love for our mother by behaving well when she wasn’t looking. Jesus is saying something similar – *If you love me you will keep my commandments*. How do people know that we love Jesus, by our actions and, as the church hymn goes, “they’ll know we are Christians by our love.”

Back to the Lord’s Prayer. Considering what you know about shekinah, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray. He replied, pray this way: *Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name*. To get to the root of “Our Father” is to dive deep into our own breath. Just like how you know (hopefully) your parents, you know God, and the Jewish notion of every breath is a prayer. God’s shekinah Spirit is as close to us as our breath. It is in us. It provides life. Thus, “our Father” incorporates the closeness of the Almighty God. It’s the beginning of our prayer.

*Who art in heaven*. Where’s heaven? Yes, I’m asking you to point. Did you point inside? All around you? Yes, heaven is in and around and through. It’s also far away and huge but this is a remind of the God who knows us, is close as our breath, and whose kingdom is in us and around us.

*On earth as it is in heaven*. For those who grew up in a loving and stable family, imagine if the whole of society and the entire earth was governed the way your family was arranged. When Jesus taught his disciples to pray this way, they were governed by the Roman Empire. Roman soldiers were on the streets to keep order. They paid a heavy tax to Rome. When Jesus was born, they started taxing people for having heads (it’s why Joseph had to go back to Bethlehem – to be counted and taxed). In that oppressive, fearful society, Jesus said pray this way: on earth as it is in heaven. Pray to have the earth governed by the shekinah indwelling Spirit of God. The place where people are loved, forgiven, restored, made whole, and sent out to do the work of God.

In the Marshall household, with my mom, dad, older brother, it was run a particular way by mom. Both my parents were involved in many activities; likewise for my brother and myself. But, at 5:30 pm every night we were to gather at the table for dinner. Period. Radios off.

Television off. Books down. It was time for dinner. We gathered, prayed, ate, talked, and then ran off to do our thing. All my friends knew we had dinner at 5:30. Often the phone would ring. One day my dad asked my friend, “Mark”, why he called during dinner time. Mark replied: because that’s when I know you all will be at home.

Once we were seated and eating, it was discussion time. We had to discuss our day and, just as importantly, listen to one another. I often wondered if my brother tried to get through a meal with just two words. I think you know them: fine, good. “How was your day?” Fine. “How are your classes?” Good. But, mom and dad wouldn’t let him off that easy. He always found words to talk.

Speaking of Mark, mom always had room at the table for others. Whoever showed up got a place at the table to eat. Mark’s home life was not as stable as mine. One night he showed up at 5:29. Mom placed him at the table. When asked how he was, Mark said: fine. Mom said, “You can lie to other people but you are not allowed to lie at this table. Tell me, how are you?” His eyes started to well up with tears and I could tell his voice got stuck in his throat. Mom took his hand, took a deep breath and said, “It’ll be okay. You are here. You are loved.”

*On earth as it is in heaven.* The shekinah indwelling mothering Spirit of God orders the household of God with love and respect and kindness. We, children of God, are to bring that order into our unruly, disordered world. Shekinah is a welcoming, receiving, inviting, compassionate Spirit of God.

One last thing – the mark of the indwelling Spirit of God is this desire we have to help and to serve one another. I heard a story at our conference last weekend about the Crockpot of God. At a church feeding program, there are students from a nearby university that come by often. One day, before the event, a crockpot showed up on the front door of the church. It was lovingly used, in the original box (without the Styrofoam), with no instructions or notes. A volunteer put it on one of the tables, still in the original box. One of the students flipped out when he saw it. He asked if he could take it back to his dorm. The next month, at the feeding, the same student came bouncing in and thanked the volunteer for the crockpot because it was “a life changer”. He then told a story enthusiastically that everyone could hear. He took the crockpot back to his dorm and that night he made soup for his other dorm mates. All four of them sat around and ate “the best” soup, ever. He was so excited because he was able to feed them. He created community. The shekinah indwelling Spirit was alive in him and making community... on earth as it is in heaven.

Today’s Gospel passage is a reminder of the indwelling Spirit of God that is in all of us. Because of that Spirit, we are to be compassionate and kind and inviting with others – on earth as it is in heaven. We are to show our love for Jesus by following the commandments he gave us: to treat others as we want to be treated, to love God with all our heart and strength and to love, the best we can, our neighbors as ourselves. *If you love me, you will do my commandments.* In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.