

Baptism of our Lord  
Genesis 1:1-5; Acts 19:1-7; Mark 1:4-11  
Preacher: Vicar, Jim Goodyear

St. Peter's Lafayette Hill, PA  
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## **“Something out of Nothing”**

In the 1995 film *Smoke*, Auggie Wren manages a cigar store on the corner of Third Street and Seventh Avenue in Brooklyn. Every morning at exactly eight o'clock, no matter what the weather, he takes a picture of the store from across the street. He has four thousand consecutive daily photographs of his corner all labeled by date and mounted in albums. He calls this project his “life's work”.

One day Auggie shows the photos to Paul, a blocked writer who is mourning the death of his wife, a victim of random street violence. Paul doesn't know what to say about the photos; he admits he has never seen anything like them. Flipping page after page of the albums, he observes with some amazement, “They're all the same.” Auggie points out, “But each one is different from every other one.” The differences are in the details: in the way people's clothes change according to season and weather, in the way the light hits the street. Some days the corner is almost empty; other times it is filled with people, bikes, cars, and trucks. “It's just one little part of the world but things take place there too just like everywhere else,” Auggie explains. And sure enough, when Paul looks carefully at the by now remarkably unique photographs, he notices a detail in one of them that makes all the difference in the world to him.

Auggie reads the world – in his case, one corner in Brooklyn – for meaning. By its very nature, his project is rooted in the everyday. He knows how closely we may need to look to see the significance of seemingly ordinary and insignificant events. He understands that some of the most rewarding spiritual journeys are those we take on our own block. That is the challenge of everyday spirituality – no star bursts, no skies opening, no mountaintop experiences. Just today and today and today. Just Auggie standing on the corner with his camera every morning. Just you and I living each day as a gift from God.

As Paul was traveling through Corinth on his way to Ephesus, he encountered some disciples. He asked them “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” Their reply was, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” I wonder for Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century when the Holy Spirit came to be known to them. Does the Holy Spirit ever leave us? I believe the Holy Spirit is within each of us in our life's work, whether it be a cigar store owner, a business professional, a teacher, a caregiver, a student, a life partner, a child. Everything we do in living shows off our spiritual selves – our life's work. It is like taking the things we think are nothing and make something special for ourselves and others. Maybe you think what you do doesn't matter, but to someone else it could mean the world. In the simple stuff of life, spirit comes alive.

The spirit fills each of us at the time of conception. What is this spirit like? The word ‘spirit’ comes from the Latin *spiritus* – literally meaning breath, to blow, breathe. Like a gentle wind that winds through the living soul of each of us. In the creation story today there was a

formless void, a nothingness that covered the face of the deep, while wind from God swept over the face of the waters. A breath of gentle wind that flowed all about to create light; to go from the darkness of nothing to the brightness of light and life; from nothing to something. The very beginning of life starts with a breath of gentle wind.

Sometimes the spirit overtakes our lives and we don't know it or realize it until we experience life. A little girl about ten years old was struggling to find her own meaning of life. She lived in a large city and often traveled by walking. She sensed that something was amiss but not really sure what that something was. Her parents did not attend church, but she knew of other people who did. One sunny Sunday morning, she walked to a nearby church, about three blocks from home. When she entered she was embraced by strangers. She felt the power of the spirit among people she didn't even know. She felt the warmth of God's love. The next week she invited her brother and sister to join her. As an adult this young woman became active in her church. She discovered the spirit moved her to find meaning to life, and then she shared that same meaning with others.

The work of the spirit comes through each of us in what we do. I have read greeting cards with the words, "it's what we do in the here and now that matters in the then and there". In the little things of living we do for others in this life that God becomes present for us. God's presence surrounds us in all our actions; in our service to each other. Albert Schweitzer is credited with saying, "I don't know what your destiny will be, but one thing I do know: the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who have sought and found how to serve." To give of yourself to others gives life. Think about that. I know when I do something for someone else, I feel filled with life, the Holy Spirit.

Just this week, I witnessed you and many others give of yourselves in a very unique way. For months I have been told, just wait till the Boars' Head. You won't believe it. It is hard to explain, it just is something that is really neat. After the dress rehearsal on Thursday evening, I was overwhelmed. The majesty and awe, the love and compassion of all involved, the patience of each other, the camaraderie between generations...all showed the power of the Holy Spirit from this place. I was amazed to see how everything seemed to go together like clockwork. This was a dress rehearsal without any other 'rehearsals' before. Sure, I knew the dancers and choir were practicing for months prior. And the costumes were being reworked after failed diets. It felt like something great had come out of nothing. There were few signs that a great story was about to emerge. Yes, maybe after 28 years, it is the same. But like Auggie's cigar store, each performance, each year shows a different picture. I saw the Boars' Head Festival for the first time at St. Peters. You may have seen it for the fiftieth time. Each in its sameness, yet unique.

God's love for each of us; sameness as a Child of God, unique in the small things of our individuality. Baptized in the Holy Spirit, sealed with the cross of Christ forever. In our uniqueness God calls us to be his child. A child of God called for service in this kingdom to be in relationship with God. To be the light of the world as Jesus is to us. Sent as God's only Son, you and I are sent to carry the light into the world. To make the world a brighter place for all God's people. As the Pastor carrying the sprite from the hall, "Let your light so shine before others so they can see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

When we open ourselves to the work of the spirit, to let the light shine through us, life changes in ways we thought not possible. To discover the meaning of life, our life's work, we need to look beyond the sameness. We might take a picture of the same thing at a specific time each day or year, but it changes just as life around us changes. Here at St. Peters, you have an opportunity to examine youth ministry from a different perspective. To look at sameness of the program for the uniqueness that makes it filled with life. For many years SPY, St. Peter's Youth, has been a part of the ministry of this congregation. This group has been active in the past with service projects, leading worship, participating in fellowship activities and gathering to learn more about each other. To share the life, love and joy of Jesus Christ, the mission of this congregation, extends to its Youth Ministry too. We are called to help the young folks of our congregation experience the work of the spirit within and through them.

It is healthy for groups to periodically take a step back and look at what is going on. This is such a time for SPY. It is time to re-evaluate how this ministry serves God. With the help of a trained synod staff person and the Holy Spirit, we can discover what might be in store for the youth of this congregation. There are approximately 100 young persons in grades 6-12 who are members of this congregation. That is 10% of the total baptized membership. That is a significant number of persons gathered to serve God. I encourage each of you to prayerfully consider participating in this visioning process. When these young persons were baptized into this congregation, you promised to raise them in the faith, to support them in their growth. "We welcome you into the body of Christ as workers together in God's kingdom. It is not only for the youth, or the parents of youth, or church staff. It is for ALL people of this congregation – young, old, single, married, male, female – called by God as God's beloved to serve the world. It requires you give three hours of your time to discover the work of the Holy Spirit within you and your brothers and sisters in Christ. There is a sign up sheet in Muhlenberg Chapel (this weekend only, outside my office). We need your help. Just as the Boars Head started out of seemingly nothing thirty years ago into something the community looks forward to; so too SPY has the same potential to become something the youth of this community look forward to participating with.

As the phoenix rises from the ashes, As Jesus rises from the waters of baptism, the Holy Spirit comes to each of us as God's Beloved Child. Take a picture of Spy today, and every Sunday morning and discover the sameness, but more importantly the differences that comes from your life's work in the world.