

THE WILD GOOSE

Acts:10: 44-48

Celtic Christians chose, not the dove, but the wild goose as a symbol representing the Holy Spirit. It sounds strange to us, but it has a long tradition in Ireland.

While the Roman Church imagined the Holy Spirit in the form of a peaceful, graceful dove, the Ancient Celts understood the Holy Spirit to be like a wild goose. When you hear of the Spirit descending like a heavenly dove on you, you hear harps and strings softly playing and get a peaceful feeling. The image of the Holy Spirit as dove has become so familiar and domesticated an image we pay little attention to it.

The image of a wild goose descending upon you is a different matter altogether. A wild goose is one noisy, bothersome bird. I like this image of the Holy Spirit as a wild goose because it jars us out of our complacency. We need such an image to correct our overly safe and overly sweet image of the Spirit. One preacher friend asked, "How many times can you sing 'There's a Sweet, Sweet Spirit in This Place' without your blood sugar reaching diabetic levels?"

When the Spirit comes in the Bible, it never seems to be sweet or safe. God's Spirit called the prophets to speak to Israel in words that were bold and sometimes dangerous. Ezekiel saw a vision of God's Spirit blowing through a valley of dry bones and bringing them to life. John the Baptist dressed in camel's hair and eating wild locusts proclaimed, "I baptize you with water but he who comes after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." Paul gave this advice to young Timothy, "For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline" (2 Timothy 1:6-7).

Neither safe nor tame, the Spirit inspired Paul to proclaim, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians 3:28).

It was this wild Goose that Jesus referred to when he preached his first sermon and quoted Isaiah, saying, "For the Spirit of the Lord is upon me for he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of God's favor" (Luke 4:18).

It is the wild Goose Holy Spirit that makes it possible for us to be people of forgiveness and love our enemies. May we pray come Holy Spirit as a wild goose so that we might be moved to be the light of Christ in this world.

God bless,
Pastor Barbara