

Acts 2:1-21 Holy Spirit Holes

The dark ages, that gloomy period of history that stretched from about the 5th to the beginning of the 11th century, was a time of cultural bleakness.

For the most part, we think of this period as a time of cold weather, bad food, and non-existent plumbing.

But there was one bright spot, one place where medieval men and women could gather for comfort and encouragement: the local cathedral.

The cathedral was, you see, the center of medieval life.

It served as a courthouse for local lawmakers, a place where travelers could find safe lodging, *and* a sacred space for communal worship.

Outside, one could find booths selling everything from flowers to sausage; a business model that is still evidenced today in older villages throughout Europe.

The presence of a busy cathedral in the town square assured a stable economic base for the residents and provided a deep sense of community.

Pentecost, of course, was one of the great festival days celebrated in these cathedrals. In fact, many of them were built *specifically* with Pentecost in mind. Their great domed and vaulted ceilings, so beautifully painted with images of heaven,

concealed, within them, a number of trap doors that were used *expressly* for Pentecost celebrations. During the worship service, a few brave souls would climb up onto the roof and, at the appropriate time, would release living doves through those trap doors!

Can you imagine it?!

Dozens of doves swooping down through the painted skies and clouds of the ceiling as living symbols of the presence of the Holy Spirit!

At that same moment, the choir was encouraged to make whooshing and drumming sounds, like a holy windstorm.

Then, as the doves swooped and the sound of the wind rose, the trap doors were open again and bushels of rose petals were showered down upon the assembly. *Red* rose petals; symbolizing the tongues of flame falling upon the faithful below.

In the medieval church, those trap doors were known as *Holy Spirit holes*.ⁱ

Awesome name, don't you think?

Try to imagine the mystery and majesty and power of such a Pentecost celebration!

Try to imagine, in that moment, everyone being caught up in the receiving of the Holy Spirit!

I suspect it had to have been life-changing!

Holy Spirit holes.

Holes through which the Spirit, symbolized by living doves and rose petals, was poured down upon the assembly.

I cannot help but wonder how we'd react
 if that same kind of Spirit-breathing, breathtaking power
 were to rain down from our church ceiling.
 Wouldn't *that* be something?!
 Wouldn't it be something if *we* were to experience *something like that*
 in our worship today?
 If *each of us* were to go out from this place
 having experienced the gift of the Spirit in some real and tangible way?

That is precisely what occurred on that first Pentecost!
 The disciples gathered in Jerusalem 50 days after Passover,
 during the Jewish celebration of Shavuot—
 also known as The Festival of First Fruits.
 No doubt the apostles,
 together with other disciples of Jesus, now 120 in number,
 have also gathered for worship and prayer;
 to praise God and give thanks;
 but, most especially,
 to plead for the fulfillment of Jesus' promise—
 his promise to send a helper and advocate to be with them forever.

“And suddenly from heaven came a sound like the rush of a violent
 wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided
 tongues, as of fire appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each
 of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit...” [Acts 2:2-4]
 Spirit-breathing, breathtaking power
 poured down from the ceiling in that room;
 the power surrounded and filled them—
 turning a room of well-intentioned yet tentative disciples into
 a force that would change the history of the world.

Do we believe in a God like that?
 Do we believe in a God who keeps his promises?

who blows through closed doors and sets our heads on fire?
Have we experienced the same Spirit blowing through this church and our lives?

Do we even *expect* God is capable of such showy displays of compassion and power?

Maybe we've all come to some sort of unspoken understanding that God must be pretty old and tired by now—
a god we can still pray to, yes,
but not one we really expect to break into or change our lives.

Oh beloved ones, there may not be any holes in Grace's ceiling,
but it sure feels like we need Holy Spirit holes now more than ever.
Not like the ones in the ceiling of a medieval cathedral,
but rather openings, conduits through which the Holy Spirit can
get into our community and our lives.

We need others.

People just like you and me and the person sitting next to you
to be Holy Spirit holes—conduits through which
the Spirit passes to proclaim God's love for the world.

Go ahead. Imagine yourself as a Holy Spirit hole!

As a holy trap door—a door through which
the Spirit's fire catches hold in this assembly;
a conduit of God's love for a hurting world.

Now, take it one step further
and think of someone that you can touch, even in some small way,
with the love of God this week.

Then do it.

I promise you—

Even if you consider it an insignificant kindness,
if done in the name of Jesus—

you will discover

the Spirit-breathing, breathtaking power of Pentecost.

To God be the glory!

The presence of the Spirit
will not always appear as tongues of fire or a mighty wind.
Sometimes the Spirit's presence
may be as quiet as rose petals dropping to the floor.
Certainly, there have been times, when the Spirit
has moved through history and the church with force and power,
but often times, too,
the Spirit blows through our lives more like a whisper.

Let us listen closely and open our hearts to God's possibilities.
Let us open up our lives and this church to the Spirit of God
who is seeking, even now, to work through us—
to make Holy Spirit holes of us,
servants through whom the Spirit is able to reach others;
others who are longing to experience God's love.
"Very truly I tell you," Jesus says,
"the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and,
in fact, will do greater works than these..." [John 14:12]

Oh, Come Holy Spirit, Come!
Amen.

ⁱ Holy Spirit Holes (to the best of my knowledge) first appeared in the research and writings of Diana Eck, specifically her 1993 book entitled *Encountering God*.