

Day of Pentecost (5/15/2016)

Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

Romans 8:14-17

John 14:8-17, 25-27

We have come to think of spiritual life as separate from material life, disembodied, transcendent. But in the language of Pentecost, to be spiritual is to be swept up into the rush of the Holy Spirit in this place, to be fully alive in this life. God's Spirit renews the face of the Earth, breathing new life into lifeless circumstances. And, even as the Spirit blows within each of us, it also blows us toward each other in love.

Do you think of yourself as a spiritual person? That may be a difficult question to answer until we settle on the meaning of the word *spiritual*. We have come to think of spiritual life as separate from material life; spirituality refers to a disembodied, transcendent reality beyond the scope of our everyday, physical existence. As such, spirituality may seem out of reach for many of us. We aren't especially adept at prayer, we aren't knowledgeable about holy things, we aren't wise like the spiritual leaders of the past. We are ordinary people, forgiven sinners, plodding through life the best we can, trying to trust God and live into our purpose, yet painfully aware of our shortcomings. Our stumbling faith may not seem particularly dignified on a spiritual level.

But the conventional definition of spirituality is awfully limiting. It's founded on the misguided assumption that ordinary life is somehow less significant than spiritual life – that the material world is profane, and physical existence is ultimately disposable. "This world is not my home," the old song proclaims. It follows that spirituality must involve an escape from the physical world to some ethereal, uncorrupted realm beyond what we regularly experience here and now. It's true

that God's promise of abundant life will finally overcome the pain and grief of life as we know it. But **earthly life is sacred enough to be created at God's command in the first place. Human lives are valuable enough to be rescued by God from the very real physical, psychological, and emotional agony of slavery. Bodily existence is dignified enough for God to take on human flesh and live among us. And, the material world is precious enough to be continually renewed by the Spirit of God.**

We cannot readily separate spiritual and earthly life because God continually brings the spiritual to bear on the earthly. **The physical world is God's garden, God's playground, and the place where God will finally dwell with God's people in fullness of life.¹ The world, in other words, is already sacred.** So, spirituality doesn't mean rising above our mortal existence or leaving it behind, but rather living more deeply into it. In the language of Pentecost, to be spiritual is to be swept up into the rush of the Holy Spirit in *this* place, to be fully alive in *this* life. To quote Brian McLaren, spirituality is "any experience of or response to the moving of the Spirit of God in our lives and in our world."²

Our first reading from Acts tells the famous story of Pentecost in the days after Jesus' departure from his disciples. The Holy Spirit blows into Jerusalem like a wind storm and rests on each disciple like a tongue of fire. Suddenly, they are filled with the Spirit's power and enabled to communicate the good news of God's salvation to a multiplicity of astonished onlookers. The Holy Spirit's arrival in Acts is awe-inspiring and unforgettable.

¹ See Revelation 21:3-4.

² *We Make the Road by Walking*, 202.

In our Gospel from John, the gift of the Holy Spirit is a promise yet to be fulfilled. Prior to his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus comforts his disciples with an assurance:

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. ...the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

Although our first advocate, our first teacher is gone from us, the followers of Jesus will never be godforsaken. According to John, the Holy Spirit will forever abide within and among us, upholding God's truth as we have come to know it in Jesus. In this way, the Spirit becomes Emmanuel,³ God with us, the spirit of the living Christ that holds us in mercy and guides our way.

Central to both of these readings for today is the affirmation that the Holy Spirit comes *on Earth*; the Spirit moves *here*, within the boundaries of created existence. We aren't carried away into an alternate spiritual reality at Pentecost, rather **the Spirit blows into our earthly lives as we live them.**

And its movement is always a cause for hope. Our Psalm for today celebrates that **the Spirit of God renews the face of the earth, breathing new life into lifeless circumstances.** Any time we gain the strength to go on in spite of all the reasons to give up, that's the movement of the Spirit. Any time we sense the urge to share the burden of a hurting friend, that's the movement of the Spirit. Any time we feel the impulse to stop and help a stranger, that's the movement of the Spirit.

³ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII-XXI*, 644.

So, the Spirit blows within each of us, but it also blows us toward each other. The Holy Spirit, the spirit of Christ takes up residence in our real, material, messy lives as a means of reaching out to others with divine love.⁴ In our new hymn of the month, “Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service,” the lyricist captures this fundamental purpose of the Spirit’s work: “As you, Lord, in deep compassion healed the sick and freed the soul, by your Spirit send your power to our world to make it whole.”⁵

So, as a means of opening ourselves to the movement of the Spirit this Pentecost, I invite you let go of your inhibitions for a moment and think of someone to whom God may be sending you. Today, you received a door knob hanger, a physical invitation to Peace Lutheran Church, this gathering of ordinary people, forgiven sinners, who are bound together by the love of Christ. When you go, take this invitation with you and, encouraged by the Holy Spirit, deliver it to a friend or family member, a new neighbor, or a stranger who might need a community like ours here at Peace. If you can’t speak to the person face to face, leave the door knob hanger in a place where it will be found. Include a note, and a silent prayer.

Who knows how the Spirit will blow through you and into another person’s life this year? Who knows the possibilities God has in store?

⁴ See Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “The body of Christ takes up space on the earth.” Cited by Barbara Lundblad, https://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2852.

⁵ Albert F. Bayly, *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*, Assembly Edition, #712.