

## “Spirit Sounds and Sightings”

Acts 2: 1 – 13

I Corinthians 12: 4 – 13

Pentecost Sunday

June 4, 2017

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Last Sunday we had one foot in the final days of the Easter season with the other foot stepping into Pentecost. Today, we are firmly planted, both feet, standing on Holy Spirit ground! We in the mainline church, including we Disciples, don't talk about the Spirit much, but today is its day! The Holy Spirit, you know, that invisible, incomprehensible, unpredictable power that we try (oh how we try) to put into words, to describe, and hence to control.

What does the Holy Spirit sound like? According to today's reading of the Pentecost story, the coming of the Holy Spirit leaves little room for peace and quiet! Today's the day of wind and fire when we are told to get out of the way and make room, make room for the Spirit and it can be kind of noisy. In addition to the regular whooshing of the wind and crackling of tongues of flame, we hear of the followers speaking in different languages all at once that day; a cacophony of sound to get our attention. And yet...and yet... in other places in the Bible, we also have scripture referring to Spirit as God's breath, quietly surrounding and creating, as in the power of a still, small voice. (Breathe on me, breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love what thou dost love, and do what thou wouldst do.) So, which one is it, noisy and boisterous or quiet, soft? Is it either/or, or could it be both/and?

What does the presence of the Holy Spirit look like? From today's reading, we have images of flames, like tongues of fire, settled on each person in the room. On Thursday, as nine of us gathered to paint the banners, we talked about these tongues of fire flames, to which one of the pre-teens in our group exclaimed, “That's just gross!”

OK, so on to a less gross picture of the Holy Spirit. The dove has long been a Pentecost symbol for the church, from the scripture story of the baptism of Jesus when the heavens opened and the Holy Spirit, like a dove, descended. I've shared with you before the symbol for the Holy Spirit from ancient Celtic Christianity – not a peaceful dove but a wild goose, representing that which is untamable, unmanageable, unpredictable and noisy! So again, which one is it, gentle or wild? Is it one or the other, or could it be both/and?

Trying to give characteristics to an invisible force is next to impossible. How does one describe the Holy Spirit, the power of God at work in the world? Maybe the best way is through results, what happens, not what the presence of the Spirit sounds like or looks like, but what the presence of the Spirit does, how we experience the Spirit in our lives.

How *do* you experience the Holy Spirit? That question was given to the group of us gathered this past Wednesday for our evening church dinner and answers varied; How do you experience the Holy Spirit? One person's answer - that moment of clarity of direction or purpose. For another it is most often through music, when harmonies blend and come together in an almost magical, other worldly way. Another's experience of the Holy Spirit is through compassion and care shown during life's difficulties and transitions. One experience often comes through prayer, or in nature. One person said it was a spontaneous moment in worship, another mentioned that outcome of planning.

So many different ways to describe Spirit, so many different ways to experience the Spirit! How do we know when we are standing in the presence of the Spirit, when our experience is Spirit filled rather than drunk on life's exuberance? In both of our texts for today, we are given some suggestions of when the Holy Spirit shows up.

In our story from Acts, something happened that day in that room, something hard to describe, to give physical characteristics, but that left those in the room radically changed. From a wandering, directionless people filled with fear to a people now with direction, connection, understanding and purpose. It was that moment that we refer to that birthed a movement that has spanned centuries. That moment when God's power came into that room and into those lives and said, 'move over, make room' and things began to happen!

Likewise, in the text from Corinthians, a favorite church camp text, we are left not with physical characteristics but with descriptions of the Spirit nonetheless as in what the Spirit does, how the Spirit is experienced. A bit of background first. There is an issue in the church in Corinth that the people want Paul to address. It's the issue of the gift of speaking in tongues. Those who had this gift of speaking in tongues assumed that this was the best spiritual gift on that long list of spiritual gifts, it was at the top, the most important, and everyone needed to aspire to possess that gift. They supported what was called the 'theology of uniformity', better to have the same gift than a plurality of gifts.

To this issue of the theology of uniformity, in walks Paul and writes his famous rebuttal: ‘No! No, there’s not one gift that is better than other. There are a variety of gifts, many members of one body with the same importance! Can an eye say to an ear, ‘I’m more important to you? Or a hand to a foot, I am valued more?’ No! For those of you who think you are superior to others, think again! For those of you who feel inferior, think again! Who you are, what you have been given lends to the beauty of diversity of the body of Christ. Is it better to have the same gifts? No! It’s better to have a variety!’

And the role of the Spirit is to hold it all together. In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians, he writes of One Spirit, that one cohesive force that unites all of these different, varied parts to be able to come together. It’s the unifying source within the body. But there’s more. The Spirit doesn’t just bring members together, but brings members together to work for the common good, we exercise our various diverse gifts in the interest of others.

So, let’s step back and look at these various parts of this Spirit talk. Try as we might to describe her in physical terms, in sounds and sights, we know the presence more fully in Spirit happenings, what the Spirit does when she ‘metaphorically’ walks into a room, or into a life or into a congregation.

I have to admit, I haven’t heard any whooshing sounds or crackling or babbling lately. I haven’t seen flames like tongues of fire, or white doves descending from the Heavens. But the last few weeks and days? Oh, I’ve gotten glimpses of the Holy Spirit at work in the world, and I’m sure you have as well!

Those of you who were in worship last week, remember the Holy Spirit filled moment at the end of worship? Dolores Yilibuw had texted me earlier in the morning to let me know that a friend of hers was in town and would be coming to church and that friend was a poet and would be willing to read something somewhere during the service if that would be OK. And I hesitated. What would she read? Would it be appropriate? Where would it go so as not to disrupt the flow of worship which is the way many experience the Spirit? During announcements, I looked over at Dolores and something nudged me to get out of the way of her poet friend and Oh I am glad I did! Her poem ‘a love letter to the church’, in both content and delivery was Spirit filled and, although maybe not

everyone experienced it as such, a number of our young people talked to her afterwards, drawn to her word form.

Holy Spirit moments don't have to be grandiose. Perhaps because of today's text in Acts, we tend to think of them as such and then miss those lesser moments; when young and not so young come together in an afternoon for banner making, not only art ideas and talent shared but personal stories and histories and life shared while brushes and scissors did their work. Connections made that maybe had not been made before. We have those Holy Spirit moments throughout the life of community; the coming together in a ministry, in the sharing of a potluck or picnic, not perhaps in the agenda itself but in those serendipitous moments when relationships are formed, when human connections are made; the Spirit – that power of God at work – bringing us together. Somehow, our differences don't matter as we are brought together by the Spirit for the common good.

The end of this month there is going to be a multi faith worship service on Pride weekend Sunday, bringing our community that is diverse in faith, with our theological differences and different church language to worship together; to praise God for the gift of our diversity and the oneness that brings us together. I am sure that the Holy Spirit will not only be there but was instrumental in the planning and implementing such an act of corporate worship!

And lest we think the Holy Spirit is limited to the walls or happenings of a church or faith community, have you seen what's been happening in the world? I agree, there's plenty of bad stuff, there is reason to despair. But take another look. Lest you feel prone to despair, look around, because the Holy Spirit, the power of God IS at work in the world. People all over the world, leaders, citizens, corporations coming together, (Partheans, Meads, etc.) to care for our planet, all sharing an understanding of the common good. People reaching across languages and divisions and caring for each other, all over this world. THAT can happen only with direction by the Spirit.

A synopsis of our faith story: Jesus died, was buried, on the third day he rose. Then he appeared to his disciples telling them that he would come again. And in this between time, he would send an advocate, the Holy Spirit, to prod us, and the church and the world into living lives of resurrection; coming together in bold new ways to proclaim not just through our words but through our living, God's way on earth as it is in heaven. Those moments, those moments when we get a glimpse of

heaven on earth? You can bet the Spirit is hanging out somewhere close by!  
Thanks be to God!