

“In The Spirit”

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Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21

John 20:19-23

Jesus said to them again,

"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."

And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them,

"Receive the Holy Spirit."

John 20:21-22

Let us pray... O God,

Help us get in the spirit by allowing your Holy Spirit to work through us
that we may be charitable, equitable, and intelligible about our faith.

Amen

Today, we celebrate Pentecost...Pentecost is sometimes called
the “Birthday of the Church” recalling when *something happened*
characterized as a dramatic demonstration of the Holy Spirit
to create, enthuse, fire-up, and breathe life into the Church –
to bring it ‘online’, so to speak.

This was described in the second chapter of the Book of Acts as a gathering
of the Twelve Disciples – which now included Matthias who took Judas’ place,
and a large number of Jewish people visiting Jerusalem
from all over the world for the harvest festival of Shavuot.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/holydays/pentecost.shtml>

Shavuot celebrates when God gave the Torah – the Word of God
in the form of the first five books of the Bible, to Moses on Mt. Sinai,
fifty days after Passover.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/judaism/holydays/shavuot.shtml>

Pentecost literally means “Fiftieth” and also corresponds to
the fifty days of the spring growing season when the first crops are harvested.

This holy day also served as a symbol to early Christians for the first harvest
of the Spirit-filled believers who would form the Church.

Suddenly, a wind blew through the gathering place of the 12 Disciples,
and they began to speak – but not just in one language.

They spoke and were understood by all the wide diversity of people there,
each in their own language.

Then, the Apostle Peter stood up and spoke to them all –
though the Bible doesn’t say, what language he used,

he interpreted what this amazing and mysterious event was about.

At last we see Peter emerge to be the leader, having regained his faith and courage,
to provide the foundation for the Church as Jesus had said...

He finally got in the Spirit.

Willard, p.2

Isn't it great when we get 'in the spirit' of doing something –
especially, something that demands something of us in order to be accomplished.
Getting in the spirit – for example, of a football game, the celebration of a birthday
or anniversary or a holiday.

At Christmas-time, don't we talk about getting into the Spirit of Christmas?

Like Christmas, Pentecost is about gifts – Pentecost is about gifts of the Spirit.

Nevertheless, it seems like there's a lot of people out there in our world these days
who are not in the 'Christmas Spirit' at all –
apart from a spirit of 'I got mine' materialism.

There seems to be a spirit of desolation over the land –
lies obscuring truth, fantasy trumping reality, scientific reports discounted
like the denial of warnings about climate-change
as if to say "How can anything be proven?"

A captured American soldier is brought home from the Taliban
in exchange for five of their POWs –

yet he is condemned as a deserter even before having a trial.

There have been even more incidents of deranged individuals
acting out personal grudges against the world with indiscriminate violence;

And – as if we hadn't heard it all,

two pre-teen girls almost killed a third girl this past week,
to appease a fantasy character from an internet website.

Of this recent incident, John Kass, a writer for The Chicago Tribune had this to say:

*We won't know for some time what really drove the girls to grab that knife
and hold their friend down and stab her, if indeed that's what happened.*

But we do know about the culture they live in.

*It is a culture that has fallen in love
with magic and fantasy.*

It is a culture that takes fantasy symbols of evil –

the vampire, the witch -- and transforms them into heroes of great virtue.

It is a culture where dark magic is celebrated,

but religion is considered bothersome. We reap what we sow.

He goes on to say:

All living things take on the characteristics of their environment.

Plants soak up nutrients or poisons, as do animals. Young humans do, too.

http://host.madison.com/john-kass-our-culture-behind-waukesha-girls-stabbing-case/article_b7e5fb1b-5287-5382-a1fa-8addd11e523d.html#ixzz33ywaeoHg

Our culture does a great job in demythologizing religion,

but perhaps we need to take a harder look at our culture –

and for us to take a harder look at our beliefs as Christians.

Censoring the internet would be no easier than gun control to change things;

We have to work for the transformation of the spirit of our culture
from an ethos of things to a narrative of loving-kindness.

Willard, p.3

Perhaps we can get the wider culture to see that imagination and inspiration can have practical applications that *give* life instead of taking it away.

Perhaps it is time to *get in the Spirit* of what builds up the Beloved Community of God's Kingdom that is yet possible on Earth as it is in Heaven...

Gifts of the Holy Spirit have two scripture references:

Isaiah 11:2 and 1 Corinthians 12:8-10.

In Isaiah, it is said,

And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

Isaiah 11:1-2

There are traditionally 7 gifts of the Spirit,

but I counted six in Isaiah unless we consider access to the Spirit of the Lord – the Spirit of God, to be the first gift.

The qualities of the other gifts are described as

wisdom, understanding, discernment – or good judgment, courage, knowledge, and awe-inspired by the 'fear' of God.

Reverence is not specifically named, but implied and traditionally included.

In 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, there are 9 gifts of the Spirit

which are described a little differently:

[8] *To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another*

the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit,

[9] *to another*

faith by the same Spirit, to another

gifts of healing by the one Spirit,

[10] *to another*

the working of miracles, to another

prophecy,

to another

the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another

various kinds of tongues, to another

the interpretation of tongues.

We don't necessarily get all these gifts or in the same way;

Yet most of these gifts have something to do with words or ideas – knowledge, wisdom, understanding, discernment,

speaking, communicating, and one more thing

which the Apostle Paul describes in the next chapter of Corinthians.

We will get there in a minute...

Willard, p.4

In Romans 12:6-8, Paul describes how the gifts are to be used...

prophets receive the gift of prophecy

in proportion with the capacity of their faith,

servants of God are given opportunities to serve

in proportion to their capacity to serve;

Likewise, teachers to teach, counselors to counsel, donors to give,

helpers to help with enthusiasm, those who act with mercy do so cheerfully.

Then Paul says in Romans 12:9:

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good...

In Corinthians 12, Paul spoke of the gifts of the Holy Spirit and

described their application in terms of the different parts of the human body –

how it all works together.

Most of the gifts of the Spirit identified in Isaiah and 1 Corinthians 12

have something to do with words or ideas –

knowledge, wisdom, understanding, discernment,

speaking, communicating, but there was something more

needed to hold it all together...

I have often heard Ken Rhoades name the 9 “fruits” of the Spirit from Galatians 5:22-23 ...

love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...

This is what those gifts of the Spirit produce when we put them to work in our lives

and in relating to those around us.

Love is the operative word – ‘love, joy, peace’, and in 1 Corinthians 13,

‘faith, hope’, love – but the greatest of these is love’.

Love is the goal and the key to discernment.

It implies empathy and responsibility, justice and mercy, peace and power.

It is the guide and the goal.

Join with me in reading 1 Corinthians 13...

[1] If I speak in the tongues of [mortals] and of angels,

but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

[2] And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries

and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains,

but have not love, I am nothing.

[3] If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned,

but have not love, I gain nothing.

[4] Love is patient and kind;

[Love] is not jealous or boastful; [5] it is not arrogant or rude.

Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;

[6] it does not rejoice at wrong, but [love] rejoices in the right.

Willard, p.5

[7] Love bears all things, believes all things,
hopes all things, endures all things.

[8] Love never ends;

[As] for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease;
as for knowledge, it will pass away.

[9] For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect;

[10] but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.

[11] When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child,
I reasoned like a child;

[When] I became [an adult], I gave up childish ways.

[12] For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.

Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully,
even as I have been fully understood.

[13] So faith, hope, love abide, these three;
but the greatest of these is love.

The gifts of the Spirit are basically about words and ideas,
but not just anything that can be imagined.

They are words that can give life, liberate prisoners, and transform the world.

The first Pentecost – the Shavuot of the Jewish tradition

was about the gift of the Word of God in the form of the Torah –

the Law of Moses with all its 613 commandments

including ‘Love the LORD your God’ and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’.

Our Pentecost is the gift of the Spirit of God

in the form of wisdom, knowledge, and discernment of the Spirit
which is love in the form of rational loving-kindness.

Though we may talk of 7 gifts of the Spirit and 9 fruits of the Spirit,
there really is no limitation to the combinations of what can be
if we just give them a chance.

Teaching children to read something more than texts or tweets;

Freeing those who are imprisoned by horror stories of their own imagination;

And giving all people a basis for challenging lies,

asking questions to get at the truth, claiming their own voice,

and creating a community of mutuality and respect –

this is what the Holy Spirit is about.

Amen

Our lesson today comes from Acts 2:1-21 which tells about the spiritual event that gave birth to the Christian church.

This was called Pentecost and refers to the Jewish festival of the first harvest...

[2:1] When Pentecost Day arrived, they were all together in one place.

[2] Suddenly a sound from heaven like the howling of a fierce wind filled the entire house where they were sitting.

[3] They saw what seemed to be individual flames of fire alighting on each one of them.

[4] They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

[5] There were pious Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.

[6] When they heard this sound, a crowd gathered.

They were mystified because everyone heard them speaking in their native languages.

[7] They were surprised and amazed, saying,

“Look, aren’t all the people who are speaking Galileans, every one of them?”

[8] How then can each of us hear them speaking in our native language?

[9] Parthians, Medes, and Elamites; as well as residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,

[10] Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the regions of Libya bordering Cyrene;

and visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism),

[11] Cretans and Arabs— we hear them declaring the mighty works of God in our own languages!”

[12] They were all surprised and bewildered. Some asked each other,

“What does this mean?”

[13] Others jeered at them, saying,

“They’re full of new wine!”

[14] Peter stood with the other eleven apostles. He raised his voice and declared,

“Judeans and everyone living in Jerusalem! Know this!

Listen carefully to my words!

[15] These people aren’t drunk, as you suspect; after all,

it’s only nine o’clock in the morning!

[16] Rather, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

[17] In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your young will see visions.

Your elders will dream dreams.

[18] Even upon my servants, men and women,

I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

[19] I will cause wonders to occur in the heavens above

and signs on the earth below, blood and fire and a cloud of smoke.

[20] The sun will be changed into darkness,

and the moon will be changed into blood, before the great and spectacular day of the Lord comes.

[21] And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Let us be guided and challenged by these words.

John 20:19-23

- [19] On the evening of that day, the first day of the week,
the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews,
Jesus came and stood among them and said to them,
"Peace be with you."
- [20] When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side.
Then the disciples were glad when they saw the Lord.
- [21] Jesus said to them again,
"Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you."
- [22] And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them,
"Receive the Holy Spirit.
[23] If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven;
if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."