



SPIRIT IN THE DESERT

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there 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 and began to

speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs-- in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

‘In the last days it will be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.
Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy.
And I will show portents in the heaven above
and signs on the earth below,
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.
The sun shall be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood,
before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.
Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’ ”

John 7:37-39

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

There are no sermons on Spirit that can do it justice. Spirit must be experienced not picked apart. It cannot be tamed or confined. The Spirit of Christ is the same spirit that occasionally wakes me up in the early morning and surprises me with joy. It comforts me when I am self-loathing. It shows itself in the most random people and in unplanned adventures. It awaits me in the desert sky and floor. The wildlife and the cactus blossoms. The birds sing with different styles but like Pentecost they all understand the one voice that inspires their song. I must confess I don't experience Spirit much in a church service anymore. But I do in the people who attend. The coffee time and the quick chats in the bathroom.

In the aloneness I sometimes feel in public I experience the companionship of Jesus in Spirit.

If we really look at our lives with full awareness, I'd bet you are able to identify the work of Spirit in your life. Not the motivational or even the inspirational, but the upper room experience of awe. The restoration of a relationship or the joy of a child being born.

This is the source of life. Flesh is not what is evil it is whatever is alive that will die. Spirit is anything that is alive that will never die. Spirit is that which animates all matter and flesh.

Spirit brings life from the ashes of grief and fear. Why else would Jesus make it a point to jolt his followers with the words I go so the Spirit will come. It is perhaps what sustained him in the wilderness times and bonded him and his friends in laughter. It met in the quiet place, away from everyone, to connect with Father.

So too Spirit links with me with those who are far away or who have passed. I remember them and know that Spirit is the space between. No wonder Jesus said, whenever you sit at the table and break bread remember me.

Jesus' love connects him with the disciples by breathing Spirit on them stirring that spiritual gift that is within them. Jesus is saying, "go get em' tigers." You have been empowered with the same power, and you have the same comforting love that holds me. Have at it! You are now imbued with the same power because we are One. Though you will not see me, you will experience Spirit beyond what you experienced with me in the flesh.

A full body, soul experience is always available to every living being. Because they have spirit waiting to be stirred. We can give consent to Spirit - to be our breath and sustain us, to bridge chasms, reverse injustice and ease suffering.

When Spirit is given consent, the ego shrinks, and I stop living my restrictive way. I feel the weight of my resistance lifted.

How can we experience Spirit like those in the upper room? How do we cross cultural barriers when we don't speak the same language in reality and metaphorically? Only by the shared well-spring of life.

Jesus embodied the Spirit of Christ while on earth. Then he made us conduits of divine life, not Dixie cups. Within us is a living spring, welling up and overflowing.

I don't want to get too graphic here, but if we have the source of life within us, what's clogging our pipes? Maybe Jesus was like a divine plumber, showing us how to empty ourselves and open our lives as conduits for the source of life — for ourselves and for others.

Life seems like a marathon as runners long for strategically placed water stations to ease their exhaustion. The runners barely have enough time to grab a dixie cup of water from outstretched hands and either splash it on their face or drink it.

Are we settling for dixie cups of spirit on our life journey? No wonder we are thirsty, tired, angry and lonely.

Jesus is saying we don't have to settle for dixie cups of water. He says to go to the source! Tap in! What does it mean to be connected to the source of life?

Perhaps Jesus is telling us our way of being is clogging the flow of living water within us. It's barely enough to keep ourselves alive, how can we point to the source in our world?

On his journey, Jesus showed the disciples the Spirit is not exactly sophisticated and law abiding either. To paraphrase German theologian Jurgen Moltmann, "the church's historical tendency has been to confine the Holy Spirit's power to ecclesiastical institutions instead of letting it freely roam the world bringing freedom and justice."

The empires of Jesus's time would have none of it. They weren't exactly free spirits as Jesus was. But I suspect the Holy Spirit is just that, a free Spirit.

Phyllis Tickle says, "The same Spirit Jesus received now rests on anyone who follows him. God invites us into a covenant whereby the power of the Spirit we can choose to allow our hearts to break and then take the pieces — our lives, our goods, our love, and our privileges — and share it all like a loaf of communion bread." —

