

THE IMMANENT SPIRIT

Acts 2:1-21
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Pentecost Sunday
First Christian Church

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Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?”

Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.”

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning! No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:

“In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.
Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.
Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.
I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.
The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.
And everyone who calls
on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

As we approach the Mission Trip season and our luncheon today that helps to fund the mission trip, I want to share with you a mission trip moment I will never forget.

I was one of the sponsors for a group of college students who spent a week in Juarez building a two room stucco house with electricity in one of those unbelievably poor neighborhoods on the Mexico side of the border. No running water in the houses and families up and down the block whose homes were mostly cardboard. A two room house with electricity was something, and on the day we blessed the house all the neighbors came to join us for a big prayer circle. We joined hands and began to pray just as one of our college students was connecting the electricity inside, taking instructions over the phone from electrician. The prayer circle was so large that one person was forced to lean against the front door as we prayed. Did I mention that the door was metal? Did I mention that the college student had reversed the wiring? Did I mention the electrical current that was part of that prayer?

I think it's the closest I will come to the experience of the first Pentecost.

But that's not the memory I want to share with you. Once our prayer circle concluded our high energy house blessing, and the wiring problem was corrected, we hit the road for the Disciple Retreat Center near Carlsbad, N.M. We unloaded our gear and got cleaned up just in time to drive to the cave entrance and watch the bats circle out of the cave at

sunset. It was magical. We ate supper and it was dark as we drove back to the retreat center. We wanted a good view of the stars and we knew there were too many outdoor lights at the campground, so we pulled the church van over on a deserted farm to market road. We climbed out, turned off the lights, looked up and caught our breath. It was a spectacular moonless night. We looked for constellations and shooting stars. We looked until our necks were stiff and aching but we weren't through taking it all in. That's when we decided to lay down in the road for a better view of the sky. We arranged ourselves in a starburst formation with our heads in the center. The heat of the day radiated up through the asphalt and the clothes we wore. A soft breeze blew across us. We continued our running commentary a while longer and then one of the leaders suggested we enter a period of silence and listen to the sounds of the night around us.

It was an experience of worship I will never forget. The song of crickets, the sound of an occasional truck in the distance on the interstate, a friendly owl, and then...

Then we heard what sounded like occasional footsteps. Then silence, then footsteps again. Just as we began to think about getting back into the church van, someone remembered we had crossed a cattle guard just a mile up the road. We were in a pasture and there were cows around enjoying the night sky and a late night snack! For most of the group, connecting the sound with cattle made them relax back into their reflection on the night sky. But for one of our young adults the sounds of cattle

nearby was almost as disturbing as an approaching grizzly bear. It was time to gather for a second prayer circle of the day, powered this time by an amazing experience of the transcendent God of the cosmos.

Listen to the way the psalmist describes God's transcendent power:

O LORD, our Sovereign,
how majestic is your name in all the earth!
You have set your glory above the heavens.
³ When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
⁴ what are human beings that you are mindful of them? (Psalm 8)
⁵ Great is our Lord, and abundant in power;
his understanding is beyond measure.
God determines the number of the stars;
he gives to all of them their names.
(Psalm 147:4-5)

Summer vacation is a wonderful time to experience the transcendence of God. Whether you're spending time in the mountains or at the seashore or some other location where you will be aware of the vast expanse of God's creation and you will be reminded that God is even bigger than the landscape in front of you or a night sky filled with stars.

But transcendence is only one way that we encounter God, only one aspect of God's identity.

God is also immanent—as close as our next breath; mindful of the smallest details of our lives and, intimate and personal, walking with us each day, deeply aware of our hopes and our fears.

O LORD, you have searched me and known me.
² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
you discern my thoughts from far away.
³ You search out my path and my lying down,
and are acquainted with all my ways.
⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.
⁵ You hem me in, behind and before,
and lay your hand upon me. (Psalm 139)

This intimate, connective aspect of God is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Paul Pastor in his book *The Face of the Deep: Exploring the Mysterious Person of the Holy Spirit* writes about our encounter with God in three persons--the distinctiveness of each member of the Trinity—Father, Son, Holy Spirit...Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer.

Listen to his words:

“The blazing uncovered glory of the Father does not pair well with human life as we currently experience it.” He points to the story of Moses up on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments and asking to see God’s face. God explains, “No one may see me and live.” Earlier in Exodus, God is present as a pillar of cloud by day and fire by night guiding the slaves from captivity in Egypt. God sends wind and fire and an earthquake to set the stage for his conversation with Elijah.

By contrast, God the Son is known to us in human form. He is the Word made flesh. You remember Jesus’ conversation with Thomas and

Philip and the rest of the disciples in John 14 and he tries to prepare them for his crucifixion:

Jesus said to them, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. ⁷ If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

⁸ *Philip said to him, “Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.”*

⁹ *Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you still do not know me? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.*

Paul Pastor writes that the incarnate form of God known to us in Jesus is glorious in its chosen limitations.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)

But it is the third person in the Trinity, the Holy Spirit that allows us to experience God’s immanence that is close and intimate, portable and personal in a unique way. Listen to the description Jesus offers in the gospel of John as he sets the stage for the arrival of the Spirit,

I will ask the Father to send you the Holy Spirit who will help you and always be with you. ¹ The Spirit will show you what is true. The people of this world cannot accept the Spirit, because they don’t see or know him. But you know the Spirit, who is with you and will keep on living in you. (John 14)

Let me offer you a checklist of how the Spirit works in our everyday life and you will see that you are already aware of the experience of immanence as an aspect of God’s love and care for you. I don’t know that

I believe God selects parking spots for people as some may suggest, but if that were true it would absolutely be the work of the Holy Spirit. Here's the checklist of the Spirit at work on our behalf:

- The Holy Spirit is the nudge we get that takes us out of our ordinary routine to speak to someone, to help someone.
- The Holy Spirit is the “Aha!” moment when we study God’s word and the words of a familiar scripture rise up off the page and connect in a powerful way with something happening in our lives or in our world. When that would happen with my friend Linda, she would say, “I know that wasn’t there the last time I studied this passage!”
- The Holy Spirit is the connection that unites members of a Sunday School Class, who learn to pray for each other, and share the journey of faith with each other, and love each other in a way that changes their lives.
- The Holy Spirit is the reason you pick up the phone and call a friend at just the right time.
- The Holy Spirit is the trail guide who helps us recognize the holy in the most the ordinary moments of our days.
- Where the church is concerned, the Holy Spirit is the matchmaker who connects a congregation to a kingdom purpose that it is uniquely equipped to fulfill.

You know this everyday form of God which is God's immanent spirit. As I share this list, it is familiar to you. And the more we pay attention to the Spirit, the better we get at recognizing and participating in the places where God is already at work all around us. But there's another important detail to knowing and understanding the Spirit. The Spirit is always available to believers but never intrusive. The Spirit waits to be invited in. And that's the reason for the ancient prayer "Come, Holy Spirit." The life we are waiting to experience is only an invitation away.

So on this Pentecost Sunday... "Come, intimate, immanent, amazing Spirit! Come and move among us!"