

The Day of Pentecost, June 12, , 2011



# “The Dance of The Holy Spirit”

*a sermon by the Rev. Audra Abt*

Texts: Acts 2:1-21; I Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 7:37-39

The Holy Spirit is living poetry, someone told me this week. God using the Word to create a new world. When we pick up the Bible, we meet God's Spirit before any other, She's right there with the Creator. "In the beginning," we read in Genesis, "God created the heavens and the earth." (Gen 1:1-2) And the Spirit of God sweeps across the dark waters. How do you picture Her sweeping? Majestic? or Disruptive? Across the chaos and unformed muck the divine wind *instigates*. This is no cool breath on a hot day. No, this sweeping exhale makes waves. God speaks something new, speaks creation into being with the breath of the Spirit. Speaks day and night, stars and star-fish and star fruits, whales and mustard seeds. God speaks as the Spirit sweeps: Dry land for creeping things, dry tinder for starting fires and honeysuckle, to stop and smell, and humankind, God breathes breath into humankind... and the dance begins.

The Bible speaks of God's Spirit as breath: pervading all, invading all, enlivening all. Present across the first dawn sky and on the lips of our broken messiah on a tree crying "Why, Lord? Why?" Resisting grammar and the compact thinking of theologians, the Spirit wafts around the corners of the Scripture's pages and finds Her way into every place of... ecstasy... and decay.

In ancient Israel, Spirit-talk was quite common. Spirit had Her way of choosing and using prophets, like Ezekiel: Lifting him up and bringing him down into a valley full of dry bones, (Ezekiel 37) Re-speaking life into God's dismayed people -- Re-breathing their wilted bodies until they stood tall together. Spirit-talk in those times took hold when the temple and traditions were toppled with dizzying force, when God's people weren't sure where to find God anymore. How to know God's voice when the comfortable places were destroyed? How to live God's ways, sing God's songs, in strange lands? But the Spirit needs no temple of stone, or brick, or wood; She finds little use of old ways that no longer sustain.

All the Spirit needs are prophets, like Joel, to speak God's hope to God's despondent people. In the Spirit, Peter speaks Joel's prophesy afresh on Pentecost, we heard it today in the reading from Acts (2:16-18) "You will know that I am ... the Lord your God... I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days." (Joel 2:27a, 28-29)

Yes, in *those days, those days* that only the Spirit, who is with the Father, knows. Those days like at Pentecost, when the Spirit went multi-lingual, Ecstatic (!) Told the story of God's glory, God's powerful hand reached into the grave and brought Jesus, the Son, the Christ, Lover and Beloved, out of death into life. The Spirit told *that* story on *that* day in whatever language the people needed, did the translating for them, opened their ears, met them where they were, did all sorts of things...probably re-taught some hearts to sing; probably got some sinners to re-think their thoughts, return to God, repent. Spirit that day was poised flame and a rushing wind. Spirit a river flowing in all directions without the current losing strength. Spirit pulling together fearful disciples and curious onlookers seeking renewal. Spirit drawing them all into Her current that tumbles and tows and churns with the life of Christ.

The Spirit is the only one really who knows those days. The Spirit sets the rhythm, dances in step while we wait, or while we try to catch a glimpse, hoping at best to possibly catch a ride on the tops of Her shoes, get a sense of that beat, see the sparks as Her feet slide and strike, starting fires wherever She dances. Dare we get close, let it catch us?

In these days, some 2000 years after that Pentecost moment, here we are, in *these* days of the Spirit. Worldwide wars interrupted by new wars, new fears, new ways to stagnate, new ways to die, to isolate, to fragmentate. We are uneasy with the way we have stewarded our natural planet; Uneasy with our failure to achieve universal progress, justice, in any sense; Uneasy with our inability to even steward our relations with each other. Voices continue to cry "Why?" but are not heard by the self-congratulated, not translated for the already-comforted.

It is possible to miss the Holy Spirit, you know.

Spirit does not always sit with the cozy. Sometimes She's a cold wind, making gums shiver and teeth crack. Spirit does not always weep and wail in the public square, sometimes She passes by in silence. The Spirit moves in these days, quiet-like, not always center-stage in Her boldest Pentecost red. Very alive, but working with nudges, sideways glances, giving vision and clarity in moments of confusion. The Spirit spoken of in the Bible is nurturer, helper, but Spirit is also the kind to break right through barriers, the hardest hearts, emancipating, setting free mangled souls, liberating whatever aches for freedom to live in God's ways.

In these days of the Spirit, the Spirit still dances and waits for partners. The Spirit doesn't sit around, the Bible says, She flows, pours, burns, breathes, beats her wings, blows wherever She desires. She's the movement - at every moment - where life shifts. She's the movement!

The Spirit doesn't create nice people, the Spirit sets about creating a NEW people, renewing the face of the people of God, and transforming a loose gathering of acquaintances into an inter-related community, possessed. A *Spirit*-possessed community. *We* do not possess the Spirit. Church does not possess the Spirit. The Church does not tell the Spirit who She is, or what she ought to do, or how She ought to do it or who She ought to use. The Spirit possesses us. The Spirit breathes in and possesses whoever She chooses, whenever She desires. And She desires. Oh yes, the Holy Spirit desires!

There's a cute joke that goes around our church: Why is it that we Episcopalians don't raise our hands up in worship?... Because we're afraid God might call on us if we did! J As I said, a cute joke, but *what if* the Holy Spirit called us out to the middle of the floor to dance in guttural, unfamiliar, syncopated rhythms? She is a *desirous* Spirit, *determined*. She does not trifle with curiosities and fads, but is building up the church: Fusing knowledge and wisdom with tongues, fusing visions and dreams with healings and miracles, taking youth and slaves, elders and strangers, and transforming them into prophets of the Living God, speakers of a living hope in Christ.

It might be *you* the Spirit is calling to use in this moment. But it also might just be, if we look closely, that these flames burning here on our altar have already left the building and are resting (like the Spirit did on that first Pentecost day) on other heads, other bodies, other tongues "out there," and the Holy Spirit calling us to *be the crowd* that gathers in awe and wonder to hear in completely new ways the power and deeds of our unchained God.

I do not know. The Spirit surpasses me, surpasses all of us, blowing wherever she chooses. The Spirit is even now poured out over schools, our neighborhoods, our street corners. The Spirit flows toward us, and away from us calling us into Her paradoxical current where we may find rest for our souls even as we struggle and strive for justice that eludes our land.

If the Spirit is a voice, She is groaning, as Paul says in his letter to Christians in Rome. She is groaning in us, praying us to closer intimacy with our God, lending prayer to this divided temple - Do we not know... Paul says to the Christians in Corinth... Do we not know that we are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in us?? (1 Cor 3:16) *We*, our bodies, and this Body that we are all a part of, are a temple where the Holy Spirit dwells, and She is lending prayer to this temple and then whisking us out into the wilderness where we just might travel with Jesus, follow the Risen Christ and find new well-springs, new ways to sign and sing of hope.

We will see the fruits, writes Paul in his letters. The fruits of living in the sway of the Holy Spirit *are* discernable, says Paul. Whatever form our encounter with Her - be it raging blaze... or small flicker; whether it's grounded creative silence... or ecstatic utterances; roaring wind that fills the entire house where we sit... or a nearly silent whisper in our hearts - Whatever the form, the Spirit does not give these gifts for us to hoard. The fruits of living in the sway of the Holy Spirit *are* discernable in our lives, we learn from Paul: Joy, courage, hope, love, patience, resilience, wonder - the ability to see clearly how we are participating in injustice, and, equally as important, the ability to change, to move into new patterns of love, of service, and of understanding.

And the ability to know that the Spirit presides over it all... the hypnotic divine heartbeat within each soul, and the untamable rhythm beyond our grasp, *She* waters the tree that bears the fruits, gives life to all things that seek shelter at her breast. And if the Spirit *is* mother bird, as She is named in Scripture, if the Spirit is mother bird, then She's beating her wings in the nest, and sending us out, it's time to fly, rejoicing in the power of the Spirit.

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With thanks to John Feather for his jokes, his unswerving devotion Christ and the wisdom with which he shares his faith.