

SERMON: Spirit Stories
TEXT: Acts 2:1-21

6-5-22

Here we are, all together in one place. Just like that first day of Pentecost. Close your eyes and imagine yourself among the crowd of believers. Suddenly from heaven you hear the sound like the rush of a violent wind. And then a blaze of fire appears and divides into tongues of flame, one flame hovering just above each person's head. Then people begin to speak in different languages.

The scene becomes confusing, but also astonishing. We're hearing all these different languages, yet we all understand what's being said. And everyone is speaking about God's deeds of power.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes confusing. Often amazing. Frequently sudden and unexpected. Sometimes exciting. Often astonishing. Frequently incredible and miraculous.

When the Spirit moves in our lives, we tend to stop and wonder like the people in Jerusalem that day, "What does this mean?"

And we are sometimes hesitant to share our Spirit Stories. At least this particular group of Presbyterians has needed a good bit of poking and prodding and begging and pleading from me in the form of newsletters and emails and announcements from the pulpit. Perhaps that's because we want to keep our encounters with the holy just between us and God. Or perhaps it's because we're still uncertain about what actually happened or what it means. Or perhaps we're hesitant to share because we're afraid that there will be skeptics, as there were in the scripture, who might accuse us of imbibing in spirits of the liquid kind.

But Peter reminded the crowd that day what the prophet Joel had spoken: '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.'

Now, that verb, "prophesy," is troublesome, I think. Because we automatically apply it to those who are "prophets," and therefore, we believe that only prophets can prophesy. That gives us an easy out. Well, not so fast. The text says, "*your* sons and daughters shall prophesy, *your* young men shall see visions, *your* old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, I will pour out my spirit and they will prophesy." One of the more recent translations of the Bible, called "The Voice," replaces the word *prophesy* with "boldly speak the word of the Lord." So, verse 18 has God saying, "Yes, in those days I shall offer My Spirit to all servants, both male and female, and **they will boldly speak My word.**"

And part of boldly speaking God's word is to tell our Spirit Stories. So, let me share with you what has been shared with me.

One person sent me an email, saying, "As far back as I can remember I have felt that God was a part of my life. Many times in my life when things seemed difficult, it always comforted me to know that God was always with me. No matter what I was going through or worrying about, I knew that I was not alone. I have learned to work to calm my thoughts and listen for what God is telling me. Through learning more about the Holy Trinity of God, Jesus, and The Holy Spirit being one together, I believe that The Holy Spirit is with me in my life to guide me and bless me. I am thankful every day for this wonderful blessing!"

The Spirit is the presence of God within us.

Brenda confessed: "I am not a Bible reader. I read devotions [and] Christian fiction novels with scripture threaded through. Barry reads his [Bible] and I feel guilty when I see him reading it. But I have tried and I get lost in it. The other night I was tired right before bed and half asleep before I got to my prayers but I

was at peace and just prayed, *God let me know what I need to do.* In a strong inner voice the sound came to me "Read your Bible!" It made me sit up! [Now] I'm almost through Matthew! That's farther than I have ever gotten!"

The Spirit challenges us.

Brenda also told of a time shortly after her mom died. She was having a garage sale, selling her mom's clothing and household items, but she was "still pretty shell shocked." She continued, "A woman bought mom's chest of drawers. I told her it was mom's and she had just passed. When [the woman] got it home, she called me back to tell me when she opened a drawer, a butterfly flew out. Mom had told me several times that the Lord had told her she had a wide river to cross. I felt like the butterfly was a message that she had gotten to the other side."

The Spirit speaks to us.

Georganne told of when her mother died unexpectedly at age 77. "Although she had been ill for some time, we were stunned by her death. That evening, while gathering my wits and

starting to organize all the myriad of necessary tasks, I walked outside and looked to the heavens. The moon was rising, and there was a perfect cross of light behind it. I believe it was God's message of love and grace to me and my family, and His continued love and reassurance of His presence in our lives. I'm sure that same cross of light [behind the moon] is often visible, but I had never seen it before."

The Spirit comforts us.

Sarah told me about a dream she had that she was in a tunnel like the ones that you walk through to board an airplane. The walls were blue and there was a very bright light at the end of the tunnel. Then her husband woke her and asked what was happening. He told her that she looked like death. She still can't explain that encounter.

The Spirit is a mysterious, guiding light.

Stephanie told me about her father, who was a smoker and also chewed tobacco. Once when he was visiting her home, he was outside in the front yard. A man in a truck stopped to ask for directions, and when he noticed the wad of chew that bulged from her father's cheek, he tore his shirt open to show a large scar across his chest. He then told about how he had also used tobacco, until he needed heart surgery. He talked about how painful it was and how long it took to recover. And how nothing was worth risking his life in that way. Stephanie's father gave up tobacco that very day, and never smoked or chewed again.

The Spirit convicts us.

Stephanie also told of a time when her husband Dave was mowing the church lawn, using a large riding mower. On an incline, the mower tipped over on top of Dave. He was holding it up with his feet, but was not able to get out from under it. He would have been crushed had a stranger driving by had not stopped to help.

The Spirit sends help.

Rosemary was 60 years old, active and healthy, when she had a near death stroke. For five weeks she was in the hospital, and "as the weeks passed," she explained, "I began to regain consciousness and I was aware of the Spirit's presence." Her family and friends also "told of God's presence with them" as they participated in her journey toward wellness. Not only did she survive, but she returned to full health and an active life, and still enjoys it twenty years later. She said, "I rely on the Spirit's awesome presence to enrich my thoughts, actions, and eternal joy!"

The Spirit heals us.

May we, as individual disciples, and as the church, speak boldly about God's deeds of power. May we be faithful witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit, so that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

To the glory of God! AMEN.