

Pentecost

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[0 : 00] I'm very excited to be here in person. I dressed up in a way that just shows my exuberance for being in front of people again. I'm very excited about this. I also forgot that you wear lipstick with masks and it leaves a mark.

But today is Pentecost Sunday, Sunday when we remember a time when the Holy Spirit fell on a group of ragtag believers who had just lost their leader.

And in this moment, we are continuing our series of Everyone Gets to Play, this journey that we've been taking through the book of Acts with some good assists from Galatians to look at how God's community of faith is being built to be inclusive.

Not one of separation or exclusion, but one where everyone is encouraged to be active participants. And the Holy Spirit showed this odd little bunch of Jesus followers that God meant it when they said that all are welcome in God's kingdom.

As we've been working through this series, we have heard the story of the Ethiopian eunuch and had conversations about the LGBTQI plus inclusion in the body of Christ.

[1 : 19] We heard the story of Stephen, whose primary role was to care for the people who needed the most. And then he got into this place where the Hebrew leaders were really threatened by him and this small band of believers.

And he called out their exclusion and their positions of power. And they killed him for it. That was good for him. But we watched the early church over the last couple of weeks learn the hard way and be held accountable for expectations they put on converts outside of the Jewish community.

And again and again, in story after story after story, we find that God is pushing our boundaries and reminding us that this gospel, this good news, this movement of restoration and renewal is for everyone.

No exemptions. And today I'm going to expound on this a little bit, but rather than just looking at a story, I'm going to put the story in the context of the Holy Spirit across the interaction of God with their people.

And I'm going to look at how this spirit of God is a catalyst that continuously pushes the boundaries and makes way for a fuller and more complete participation in God's movement for all of us.

[2 : 50] So Pentecost. Pentecost in and of itself existed before Christianity. It was actually in the Hebrew calendar. It was a festival celebrating the first fruits of the harvest, also sometimes called the Feast of Weeks.

And it was a festival that included a large feast for everyone. And if you don't believe me when I say everyone, you should check out this super fun, easy to read book in the Old Testament called Deuteronomy that talks about it in chapter 16.

This was a feast that you were able to give a free will offering to the Lord depending on how you've been blessed in the last year. And in this celebration, when you started harvesting the first harvest, you were intentionally meant to leave parts of your fields unharvested so that those who were food insecure could come and glean it and be taken care of.

And when you celebrate, this is a list of the people who were supposed to come to this feast. It was you, your sons and daughters, your slaves, both male and female, the local Levites, the strangers, the orphans, the widow.

In this celebration, everybody gets to play. So in the time of Christ, after he died and was resurrected and ascended back to heaven, the Feast of Pentecost happened.

[4 : 18] And during this time, the followers of Jesus are gathered together in one place. Now, it wasn't just the 12 disciples. It was about 120 people, men and women, even the mother of Jesus, people who have followed him, who had listened to what Jesus had said, who had seen the miracles, who had been disciples.

They were here. And as we hear this story in Acts 2, we hear that the people were gathered together and they all heard what sounded like a violent wind.

And suddenly, there were little flames, little tongues of fire on everybody's heads. And everybody, all of them, started speaking in different languages as the Spirit led.

In fact, it was so nuts that everybody who was outside, who they started interacting with, was hearing these people speak in their own languages. And if you read Acts 2, there's like 10 different regions that people said, hey, I was hearing them talk about the acts of God in my own language.

All were amazed. Some were a little snarky. And so Peter gets up to speak. And he references a prophecy in the book of Joel.

[5 : 38] This is so significant because at this time, when God had set aside a celebration that mandated everybody gets involved in it, that the Spirit moved on everyone in such a way that everyone who encountered it began to experience it in their own language.

So Peter says, look, we're not a bunch of drunkards. In fact, what you're seeing is the prophet Joel being fulfilled.

This is what prophet Joel said. And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men will see visions.

Even on my servants, male and female, in those days will I pour out my Spirit. Are you catching the similarities between the festival, the prophecy, and the experience?

The prophet Joel in his word is reminding the ancient Hebrew people. God doesn't just belong to them, but the entire purpose of God dwelling amidst their people was so that through them all the people of the world would be blessed.

[6 : 51] And over and over, God set the standard that God's desire was for reconciliation, for restoration, for justice, for God's creation, for the people created in God's image, to be fully themselves and fully in relationship with God.

Over and over, in every iteration of God's people, ourselves included, we've actually missed this to some degree.

And yet, God continues to send us a reminder through his Spirit. Dr. Will Gaffney, who is a womanist Hebrew scholar and theologian and a priest, has this book called Daughters of Miriam, Women Prophets in Ancient Israel.

It's a fantastically meaty, very academic tome. But she does discuss this prophet Joel and this passage, and she points out something that's very vital to the conversation that I'm having with us today.

She says, when you look at this passage, you have to notice the mirisms at play. Now, a mirism is a statement that includes two points of reference, but the statement encompasses both points and all points in between.

[8 : 14] Like, near and far, or through thick and thin, or night and day. Like, if I say to you, I've been searching high and low for my house keys, you don't think, wow, I know Becky looked at the top of her bookcase and in the cupboard above the fridge and underneath the sofa and in the boxes under her bed.

What you hear in your head is Becky looked everywhere for her house keys. That's a mirism. It means from high to low and all points in between.

We see mirisms in the poetry of Scripture written all over the place. Like in the Psalms when David says, if I was in the heavens or if I made my bed in the depths, your spirit is there.

David wasn't just saying, oh, if I go up there and if I go up down there, those are the two places your spirits are. He was saying, no, it doesn't matter if I'm the high or the low or any point in between.

Where can I go to hide from your spirit? Or when Paul in one of the epistles says, look, I know that neither death nor life nor angel nor demon nor the present or the future nor the, like, and he just lists all these things nor powers nor anything in creation nor height or depth, nothing can separate us from the love of God.

[9 : 38] And he's again using this mirism to talk about it's not just one and the other, it's both and all points in between. When we see this in the poetry of Genesis where the evening and the morning are the first day, well, not just an evening and a morning make a day, it's all points in between.

Or the sea and the dry land are created, well, all things are created, not just sea, not just dry land, right? Or we are created in God's image, male and female.

And Rabbi and theologian Margaret Mowers Wenig points out again that this is a mirism in a litany of mirisms, male to female and all points in between created in the image of God.

So when we come to this book of Joel and this prophecy we see in action again, mirisms, old men, young men, from old to young, my servants, male and female, from male to female, all these points and the spectrums in between.

And as I see it, this prophecy is a part of a promise, a promise started in creation when the Spirit of God, which incidentally in Hebrew the word ruach is the word, it is always referred to as feminine.

[11 : 04] This ruach is involved in the beginning. She hovers over chaos, she troubles the waters, she is breathed into all mankind and in this prophecy when she is poured out, the Spirit, the catalyst of creation, breathes life into acts of meaning, visions, dreams, and prophecies and makes them accessible to all, not just a chosen few.

So when we come back to that specific Pentecost, when a spectrum is sitting in a house together, waiting to see what comes next now that Jesus is no longer with them, here comes the breath of God.

In Greek, this is pneuma, the breath. And all of them have what is like a flame over their heads. All are filled.

All begin to speak in other languages. All. and these early followers of Jesus begin to get a taste of what is to come. A to come whose fruit includes meaning-making acts where Ethiopian eunuchs are baptized and Gentiles join the mission and hierarchies are challenged and demolished.

these moves put the community of God, move the community of God from the chosen few to the many.

[12 : 43] And as my friend Victor Uydoiwa puts it, we need a plural of the presence and depth of understanding. We need more than one language, one people group.

We need more than one past and one future. We need more than one story. We need all the stories. And here, men to women and all points in between and young and old and all points in between, all nations and peoples and languages are not just included, but become necessary partners in God's family.

And I don't use the word family lightly. I'm going to be honest that I'm trying very hard to tread carefully as I speak today.

I grew up in charismatic churches, churches that value strongly the move of the Spirit and build the pursuit of the Holy Spirit into practices and faith milestones.

And honestly, as I wrestle with, deconstruct, and regrow my faith, this is one of the most difficult things to process and work out.

[13 : 59] Speaking in tongues and healing and prophecy and language around that has in too many instances been used to shame or control. It's used to enforce an exclusivity that permeates too many church experiences.

And for me, with my history, this is like a fraught minefield to even talk about. And I can't in any way speak about Pentecost and what is happening here and the Holy Spirit and where we go from here with just acknowledging the fact that I struggle with this.

I don't know all the things. And I could sit and talk quite frankly for hours about how I don't know how to process this, but I think that is a conversation for another glass of wine.

So I also don't want to be disingenuous in this moment. don't pretend to have this all figured out. And I'm not going to be telling you like just here's all the holy truth that you need to put into practice because that's not helpful for either of us, right?

So as we spend the rest of our time together, I'm going to try and tease out a few strands from what I've already talked about and use it as a challenge point for us to wrestle with.

[15 : 12] Because I don't know about you, but when I talk about wrestling, it means when I've come up against something I need to understand it. I need to get into it and chew on it and process and maybe rage against and reckon with.

And when I walk away from that, even if it doesn't become a part of me, I still am changed by that process. So I encourage you to do the same with what I say today and what I lay out before us.

You don't need to agree with me, and I'm not any holier than anybody else because I'm up here. But honestly, if you don't disagree, let's sit down and have a talk about it over a cup of coffee because I guarantee that you and I are both going to come away grown and better people from learning from each other.

So now that that sort of caveat is over, let me talk about the Holy Spirit as a catalyst. So this ruach, this pneuma, this breath, I believe is a catalyst.

A catalyst of creation as we see in the beginning. A catalyst of God's interaction with their people. A catalyst for visions of a new way through prophets and dreams and speaking.

[16 : 32] A catalyst of reconciliation and when the ruach hovers, when she is moving, things change.

Philip runs alongside a chariot and Stephen challenges authority and Peter dreams of unclean things being called clean and Saul, a man who stood by and watched a murder, is transformed into Paul, the apostle.

And Jesus, well, when the Spirit descends on Jesus and he is tested and then he starts his ministry, he goes into the temple and he reads from a scroll in Isaiah 61 and this is what he reads.

The ruach, the breath, the Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me. Why? Because now is the time to announce the year of the Lord.

It is good news to the oppressed. It is for me to bring comfort to those who mourn. It is for me to bring freedom to captives. It is for me to bring release to prisoners, to bind up brokenhearted, to bring joy instead of despair, to become restorers of homes and cities.

[17 : 53] In this scripture, we see that the ruach is a catalyst for restorative justice, for making things right and rebuilding what has been laid to waste, for upending harmful systems of power and restoring freedom and just be careful with that word freedom because we constantly misuse it.

Make no mistake that the Spirit is not in the business of propping up oppression. She is constantly and continually hovering over chaos to bring life.

Ways in the wilderness and streams in the desert or uprooting and tearing down systemic racism and injustice and misogyny and shame and prejudice and breaking the foundations that were built on the backs of others.

So when Jesus read this scripture and said it was being fulfilled in that moment, through him, the ruach, the pneuma, the breath, was the catalyst for this new move of God.

God, one that moved closer to God's agenda for all, reconciling all to God and restoring things. The Holy Spirit, when it came in Acts after Jesus left, meant that this move didn't die with the man, the Son of God.

[19 : 19] Instead, it was meant for all the disciples of Jesus, the ones who were walking with him and learning from him in person, who now had to figure out what to do next.

It meant that they learned they had to carry on this mission. And as we have seen over the last few weeks, they had some success and some not success.

They struggled with which ones among them would be the image bearers, the mission carriers. And systemically, the Spirit breathed on them, reminding them that it was all.

Everyone got to be a part of this. No, not just the people who looked like you, or were circumcised like you, or were the same religion as you, or spoke your language, or kept the same dietary laws, or were the same gender, or were the same socioeconomic background.

The ruach kept blowing the boundaries wider. So Paul talks about this in Galatians, and he uses this metaphor of family.

[20 : 27] In Galatians 4, he talks about our roles in the family, and this uses this language of adoption. And Paul said, the same Spirit that blew in Jesus is now blowing in and through us.

It is a catalyst of adoption, a catalyst of familial relationship with God, saying, so you are now no longer a slave, but God's child.

And since you are God's child, God has also made you an heir. But an heir to what? I believe, as we see in Acts, that we are heirs to the mission and the movement of Jesus, which is, of course, the mission and the movement of God.

God, the ones where the children of God, the Spirit-filled image bearers are agents of restorative justice. That when we choose to join with God through the catalyst of the Spirit to bring restoration of all things, of making things right, of healing and restoring and speaking truth to power, even power structures in the church, we are joining with God's mission and being a part of his family.

And here's the thing. Like Paul writing this, he had experienced the Spirit's presence in evidence in everyone. From the women who worked with him and led churches to Jewish men, both educated and blue-collar workers.

[21 : 59] Across racial and ethnic divides, he was seeing Joel's merism in effect. All, old to young, male to female, slave to free, Jew to Gentile, all were becoming heirs.

All, through the catalyst of the Holy Spirit, were taking ownership of this mission and movement of Jesus. And still today, the Ruach, the Numa, is still blowing.

It's reminding us that, like on this day, thousands of years ago, a new thing is being done. And you and I get to participate as children, as heirs of God, in the mission and the movement of Jesus, renewal of all things.

And many of us, either here or listening in wherever you're listening online, you have been told in one way or another this is not for you. Your age, or your gender, or your gender expression, who you love, how much money you make, your race, your ethnicity, your size, your attractiveness, your singleness, or your merriness, your education, your mental health, your experience, your purity or lack thereof, your whatever, you fill in the blank there, excludes you from being a part of this.

And that's wrong. You and I get to participate as people created in the image of God, as all points on the spectrum, as children and heirs in the mission and the movement of Jesus.

[23 : 45] But if you've been told this is not for you, let me challenge you that there is a way to know if it is. Paul again, when talking about the spirit in Galatians 5, this pneuma, this breath, he said it can be seen by the fruit it produces.

These fruits show that the spirit is present. And he lists, and although this is a really good list, I don't think it's exclusive, but he says, you can tell the spirit is present if you see these fruits, love and joy and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and self- control.

We could probably do a whole series where we deep dive on each one of these things and how it plays into the mission and movement of Jesus. But for now, just breathe and take a minute.

Where we love, the spirit is moving. Where we are kind, the spirit is breathing. Where we are gentle, the spirit is moving.

And if you are showing these fruits in whatever capacity, the spirit is moving in and through you, and you are a part of the spirit's work, you're not excluded.

[25 : 01] And still, the ruach is blowing, the spirit is blowing, the boundaries wider. Wherever love is shown, she is moving.

Wherever patience is practiced, she is working. And the spirit of God is present and working everywhere. Wherever peace is being wrought, she is catalyzing.

And we, as heirs, get to partner with the spirit as she works in and through it all. Like, Paul challenges us in Galatians 5, since we live by the spirit, breath that was breathed in, let us keep step with that spirit.

I want to add something that I wish I had heard as I was growing up in the church when it comes to all of this. You and I, online or here, present, and I'm making a bit of assumption in this, but since you're listening, I think it's a kind of safe assumption.

We've made a choice to be a part of this faith community and follow in the ways of Jesus. To be a part of this spirit-led family working for renewal and restoration.

[26 : 17] But we do not have the lock on it, nor have we perfected it, and in many times, we are not even the best at it. Like, when we willfully ignore systemic racism in our own denominations and churches.

When we don't speak up for justice on behalf of Asian American and Pacific Islander people being targeted or assaulted for, and not just limited to, the pandemic.

And people outside the Christian faith work for justice and are kind and are restorers, and they loose the chains of injustice and are loving and show self-control.

And sometimes they do it way better than we do. As Bishop Desmond Tutu puts it in his book that, oh my gosh, the title of this book was so challenging to me, God is not Christian.

He says, surely we can rejoice at the eternal word, the logos of God, enlightens everyone, not just Christians, but everyone who comes into the world.

[27 : 31] That what we call the spirit of God is not just a Christian preserve. For the spirit of God existed long before Christians, inspiring and nurturing women and men in the ways of holiness, bringing them to fruition and bringing to fruition what is best in all.

My lens and the way I choose to believe frames the inspiration and the nurture, the restoration and the renewal and the love and the justice in action as the spirit at work.

And that she can catalyze this wherever it's happening. We as Christians don't need to co-opt it or spiritualize it and name it and claim it as ours or condemn it if it isn't Christian.

But we can celebrate that it's happening and choose to join in what the spirit is doing. Here, the spirit is doing a new thing even now.

All near and far, old and young, male and female, rich and poor, Christian or non-Christian, and all points and spectrums in between.

[28 : 46] We all get to join in. So I'm going to challenge us as we move to communion here to make this a little bit personal for yourself.

This table, we talk about this table being a place of grace and all can come. If we are people of inclusion, where are the places?

Where are the places we touch every day where we need to be partnering with the spirit to move? Well, this table is going to be brought to you. This table, check over water, for example.

Let's do a little bit of showcasing. In just a situation where this body is a ministry thaters are still going to be commanded by the spirit of the spirit, what is that the purpose of the spirit, Sa■■■■ give you some people that not only can be CHRIS, But here, the days before you come and see a little bit of emotion, it'll be the moment in front of our Éson.