



# Hear the Word

from Pastor James N. McEachran



Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

## Day of Pentecost

May 20, 2018

### Vitality Index

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Holy Spirit. Ever wondered...Where is the Holy Spirit? If asked, each of us would have our own sense about answering that important question for this day.

- Some might say "It's mostly about affirming a presence outside of ourselves." As in, "I not sure why I made that decision, avoided that action, went to that place." The Spirit, holy or un-, gives direction.
- A friend once said, "I really struggled until the Holy Spirit made the choice for me and I responded."
- Or, "Thanks to the Holy Spirit, I was given the words."
- Or, a phrase I use at times, "Let's see where the Holy Spirit leads us, leads me."
- And we, in community, we often make a Confession of Faith which includes "I believe in the Holy Spirit." (Apostle's Creed) Or, not that often, the longer version (Nicene Creed) which declares "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets." Sounds like a whole lot of work!

The résumé of the Spirit begins, of course, in Genesis 1, at Creation, "And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters." Then, God's words, actions; and here we are as players in the world that we trust God's created.

That Spirit was often present in the Scripture, leading, pushing, giving words, calling, helping, and supporting. But, for our purposes, we next connect at the Baptism of Jesus. River Jordan, John the Baptist, up out of the water and Jesus "saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove."

A moment in time of calling, equipping and sending this son of Mary into the world to teach, to serve, to die, to rise, to ascend to the Father once for all. Leaving the disciples waiting. Don't miss that, it is a cue that faithful disciples are often found waiting, sometimes wondering, "When will the Spirit direct?"

The Gospel you have just heard is pretty clear: the disciples were going to be quite uncomfortable with Jesus' last days. He speaks of his ending, there will be sorrow, but the promise of re-creation is that Jesus will send the Advocate, the "untiring supporter, promoter, empower-er." As in..."When

the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...speak what is heard, about the things to come." The gift from the God Jesus calls "Father," is to take all that the Father gives to Jesus and through the Holy Spirit is given to us for mission, in our calling to be the people of God in the world, forgiven in Christ, and send in mission, to love and to serve, to be a colony of heaven on earth for all people.

So there they were, fresh from the closed door of an upper room, convinced that Jesus was raised, and with 120 faithful disciples ready for the next step, the next path in their life together.

The Pentecost Story is from what I would call "The Acts of the Holy Spirit." Here is what happened: 1) They waited as Jesus commanded, 2) They received a promise of power. A community of hope trusted they would be directed.

So they were in prayer and keeping Pentecost, the remembrance of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai. And they received unparalleled power to be the Church. You can barely get it: rushing wind, tongues like as of power, newly found courage as Peter (the denier) boldly witnesses with startling clarity that they had a message to share, through Scripture, with the power and will to communicate their message that "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved."

So, again, what is the Holy Spirit about on this Day of Pentecost in your life, my life, our life together in mission in 2018? What is the Vitality Index of the Church in the world, our congregation in the power of the Holy Spirit?

"Vitality." A state of being strong and active. Life, energy, bounce, verve, drive, punch, get-up-and-go. Think of the vitality of seeds come to fruitfulness in the blossoms of spring. That is the community in the power of the Holy Spirit, nudge. Seeds sown bring life. In the Church, the Spirit too responds to challenges, initiatives that are new, and time of change. That is the expanding Church through the seasons of life that led one day to the mission of Saint Andrew's Lutheran Church on the birth day in 1956. But, where is the Holy Spirit nudging you, nudging us today in a new day?

Here is the fact: the market shares of churches are in decline. In these past weeks, the news that Grace Lutheran Church will be disbanding for lack of membership and ministry presence; the word that new congregational starts are not thriving with a lack of folk who even consider going to church.

Pastor Unti, serving as Bishop, recently wrote these words:

"There is a paradigm shift. In a former time, there were meetings to teach a congregation 'HOW TO GET MORE PEOPLE IN THE DOORS.' Those days are over. Expecting people to discover your church by coming on a Sunday morning is not the future. There is a need for people to let go of hard held concepts such as 'coming or going to church' but to see themselves as being the church."

In a digital age, where platforms of social networking is very often the KEY to engagement, where I don't even have to leave home to get most of what I need to life (aka The Amazon Effect), what draws me, our neighbors into this place as a Third Place to find "analog" relationships where people talk and walk together in common goals of life supportive life through all the epochs of their days given by God?

Often Knowledge is Power in The World We Share. Reliance on metrics is the place where, once evaluated, reviewed, and plotted, we build plans for success. Surveys, polls, customer responses by which you might win something are the way of the day. As in "How's the Yelp Review of your congregation Pastor?" Yet, it is the narrative of relationships that builds vitality: the stories where lives are changed through the ministry of a Health and Wholeness team, a prayer shawl given, a meal shared; have you heard about the Bridge Ministries Dinner? Heard what our students have done in mission and will do in Montana? Fill an envelope in support of them...they are us!

I submit that the relationship stories, the narratives of growth in discipleship, and the nudging of the Spirit draw us into the future. Some months ago, the Joshua Process asked that we LISTEN, LEARN, AND DREAM. My point of view is that we do pretty well on the first two, but we don't often mark the time to DREAM and wonder, discern and pray about where the Holy Spirit is leading us in these days of opportunity.

We all know we are in changing times. In our world, in our nation, in our city, in our faith community. All around us are signs of marked growth in our neighborhoods of missional outreach: we live in one of the fastest growing economic areas in the region, light rail lurks at the corners, we draw from four corners of the Puget Sound, we are seeing younger families, singles, and people of diversity. We are sound in mission with a deepening sense of more than dollars, but about life commitment to follow in the servant way of Jesus. Yes, we gather, encouraged, equipped, and sent. I never hear, have never heard once, that we do not face and step up to a mission reach when nudged by the Spirit. Consider Saint Andrew's Housing Group, now Imagine Housing, and our collaboration to end homelessness once and for all!

Beloved, the early Church did not deal in scarcity, deficit, fear and doubt because they learned to trust the Holy Spirit. In Reformation times, Martin Luther, when asked "When do I get the Holy Spirit?" had this response" "Glaubst du, so hast du--Believe and you've got it."

Do we trust the Holy Spirit? DO you? It is my point that times are changing rapidly in the world, our communities, our lives. Some resist, most compromise with it, others long for it. The Holy Spirit is changing us out through what I have learned to be adaptive change in mission. We do not long for what worked 5 years ago, the way we were, or seek short cuts, fast paths to shore up the team. Or conform to the ways of the world. We call and pray, "Come, Holy Spirit!"

Vitality best happens when experimentation is adopted in response to the world. We can have all the knowledge we need, metrics and information dumps too, but that does not lead to understanding. That comes through prayer and adopting new ways together. The future is about taking a risk; fail; risk; fail and experiment in doing new things over and over again. (Like the Walk to Wittenberg, Bihar, reviewing and making new a ministry patterns to middle schoolers that does not live out of a ten year old ABC [Affirmation of Baptism/Confirmation] model, but in the changing ways of education and being the church, creating small groups around support and mission, creating a VBS [Vacation Bible School] program that fits our northwest culture and speaks of Spirit led stewardship of God's creation, making our campus ever more ready to be more hospitable in a time when people seek safe space, to grow and be in community where your life not based on your status bar or the length and number of your tweets in a day!

(And, dare I say, reviewing carefully what it means to staff a ministry team that does not look back, but takes an adaptive Spirit stretch in what and where God wants us to be in the next decade or two! Building on what is a clear vision renewed by leadership and people through prayer, discernment, and action.)

I have read recently, there are two kinds of church: the fast-asleep church, self-satisfied that things are just about how they used to; the frenetic church that enacts programs left and right to give some upgrade to excite the crowds and fill the pews.

Both will fail! The key to the new day, simple really: Stick to the core foundational belief that "Christ has died! "Christ is risen! Christ will come again." And that the in between times are about Holy Spirit renewal.

My charge to you, to us: take time, be in time, dream and trust that the Holy Spirit is going to surprise us beyond all expectation. It begins here: at Font, at Table, in the Word and prayer, but most clearly in the Peace and Pace we will share!

Have you seen the Holy Spirit today? Will you see the Holy Spirit in the new week? Think about your actions, your schemes and plans?

In Galatians 5, Paul reminds congregations facing “issues” that the harvest of the Holy Spirit is found as a gift of the Holy Spirit...Where do you find the Holy Spirit? In love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness gentleness, and self-control.” Paul’s words “There is no law against these.”

The Day of Pentecost. In our world, our hearts the central ethical core of the Faith is found in Jesus out of whom and with whom all good things come by the power of the Holy Spirit.

May it be so in this place, in our lives, that the all might see anew that we have been with Jesus, that WE have BEEN with JESUS. May it be so, Amen!