

“ROOTED by God’s Spirit”

NT: John
Acts 2:1-21

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When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” ¹³ But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:¹⁷ ‘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.¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

The Word of God for the people of God. **Thanks be to God.**

Today is Pentecost. That means today is the day we recall the presence and power of God’s Spirit birthed, breathed, and brought forth on the early church. And what do we do when there is a birth? We celebrate! How do we celebrate? With a birthday party! And a traditional birthday party isn’t complete without a cake with a candle and a song. Well, I have a cookie cake, with a candle, and I believe Cory can help us with a song.

Now, some might say, you can't have a birthday celebration without presents. Maybe, maybe not. For the church and for God's Spirit, presents don't look like bags or boxes with colorful paper or ribbon. The best present for today is our open heart and willingness to allow the Spirit room to dwell in our hearts and in our lives.

From our conception, I believe the life inside all of us is possible because of God's breath, *ruach*, God's Spirit, being breathed into us. Therefore, if we are alive, and indeed not lifeless zombies haphazardly walking the earth, then we are spiritual beings with God's Spirit inside us. The presence of God's Spirit is what gives us the ability to make a divine connection with God and build a relationship. But as we all know; our lives have been full of many things that tempt us and pull us away from the powerful source of God's Spirit driving our lives.

As the saying goes, "if God is your co-pilot, switch seats."

We get distracted and we begin to allow other factors in life, like culture, fear, expectation, reputation, history, and ritual traditions to derail us from a faithful life of discipleship, which is only possible through the power and presence of God's Spirit living in us and through us.

So, if God's Spirit dwells in us from the beginning of life, what that means is that we must surrender the control of our lives (which is so very hard) to the Spirit. And yes, this even means at the risk of looking to the rest of the world as though we are drunk, crazy, and foolish, from time to time, like those present in the early church. God's Spirit has the ability to make us move and dance and sing and talk and lead and teach and love and serve in ways we never think possible. Even in ways we work very hard to hold back for fear that someone else might see and know and judge us for what we are doing or thinking. As Peter says, "these are not drunk"; this is what it looks like to reveal God and be an instrument of God's prophetic acts.

As God's children, we are not called to live in fear of our fellow human, directing the way we live by what others think. We are called to live in fear of God, participating in life in accordance with what God thinks. God does not want us to act out of fear of others. God wants us to act out of fear of God. This does not mean we are to quiver at God's feet and spend our life walking on eggshells. What living in fear of God means is we respect the true power of God and trust God's ability to lead us to a full and joyful life. Any life apart from this means falling away from God and stumbling in the darkness. We do not want to stumble in the darkness. The reward of living in fear of God, Rooted by God's Spirit- that is allowing the Spirit to be active in and around us- is a life of purpose, belonging, adventure, joy, and true life. This reward is available to us all when we defer, concede, and invest to a life full of God's Spirit.

When the prophet-judge Samuel anointed David with oil to be the new king of Israel, the next statement is that "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 Sam 16:13). At this point in the history, we have already seen that God's pattern with Moses

and the elders of Israel, Joshua, the Judges, and Saul was to empower them by the Spirit for leadership and military prowess.

In David's case, all his accomplishments subsequent to being anointed by the Spirit are to be interpreted as empowered by the Spirit. By contrast, the Holy Spirit had abandoned king Saul because of disobedience. After David, the Spirit of God also gifted Solomon with great wisdom, a natural connection with being anointed as king. Unfortunately, being anointed by the Spirit did not prevent Samson, Saul, David, or Solomon from failing in many ways. They were still human with constant temptation and distraction just like us.

Fortunately for us, God's Spirit and power are not stopped by failure. Despite David's failings, he figures as the model of God's future work to save the people through the ultimate Anointed One, the Messiah to come in David's family line. The patterns of anointing prophets, priests, and kings come together in Jesus the Messiah. By these three roles, Jesus is the man empowered by the Spirit to declare, reconcile, and accomplish God's salvation for the people.

In Luke 4:18, Jesus fulfills Isaiah's prophecy (61:1), "The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; he has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners."

In Acts 10:38, down the line from the invasion of God's Spirit upon the early church on Pentecost, it is recalled by the apostles, "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him."

Luke-Acts emphasizes a theme that the same Spirit at work in Jesus is now at work in Christians; this theology is concisely restated in the metaphorical statement of anointing. For example, John reminds Christians about the Holy Spirit's indwelling and teaching of them by saying merely, "you have an anointing from the Holy One [= Jesus] ... the anointing which you received from him abides in you ... his anointing teaches you about all things ..." (1 John 2:20, 27). It is John who also presents that as Jesus' earthly life was coming to an end, an advocate, a companion, a guide, a benefactor, would come and be present with them. The same Spirit that worked in and through Jesus, the same power that enacted all those miracles, the same presence that gave Jesus purpose and peace and trust, is God's gift to the church.

So, I guess this means the church's birthday celebration with presents is not only about the present of our hearts and lives we give God, but a birthday celebration God is throwing for the church with the present of the Spirit. Will you receive God's gift?

Pentecost, the outpouring of God's Spirit, is a real thing. You and I today, we, are meant to receive the same experience that came upon the Apostles. We are all meant to know God, to walk with God and to receive the graces we need for our daily lives ROOTED by God's Spirit.

I would like to shift now to how we can be ROOTED by God's Spirit; what we can do to connect more with God's Spirit?

Pray: Talking with God is never a bad thing. Jesus did it before every major event in his life.

E.M. Bounds offers, "What the Church needs today is not more machinery or better, not new organizations or more novel methods, but men (and women) whom the Holy Spirit can use- men (and women) of prayer, men (and women) mighty in prayer."

A common prayer we can pray, asking for the Spirit to be alive in us is the hymn we began our worship with today. "Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me, fill me, use me. Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me." Pray this prayer daily or even multiple times daily and watch as the Spirit moves in and around you.

Listen to promptings and inspirations: The urge we feel to do something or say something good is inspiration. We don't always follow inspirations perfectly, but the more we are aware of them the more likely we are to follow them at some point. And if we know God, we know God is persistent in sending us messages God wants us to hear. Listening to and obeying the urges to do good and speak life is embodying the power of God's Spirit.

There is a story of a twelve-year-old boy who was saved at a revival. Later, his friends questioned him about it. One said, "Did you see a vision?" Another said, "Did you hear God speak?" The boy answered all of these questions with a simple no. "Well, how did you know you were saved?" they asked. The boy replied, "It's like when you catch a fish, you can't see the fish or hear the fish; you just feel him tugging on your line: I just felt God tugging on my heart." I will simply add that it does not take attending a revival. God tugs on our hearts all the time.

Stick to prayer and celebrate the sacraments: Prayer and the sacraments are the ways in the which the church is reminded of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit the most. Whether we are celebrating baptism, a symbolic act embracing God's claim and cleansing and anointing, or communion, a symbolic act embracing God's ultimate sacrifice and gift of love, we are transformed, changed for the good, by the power of God's Spirit.

A young missionary was given a car to help him in his work. The car was a major asset, but it had one difficulty- it would not start without a push or a jump-start. The young man devised a system to cope with the car's inability to start. When he was ready to leave his home, he went to a nearby school and asked permission

to bring some of the children out of class to help him push-start his car. Throughout the day, he was careful to always park on a hill or leave his engine running when he stopped for short visits. For two years the young missionary used what he believed was an ingenious method to enable him to use the car. When poor health forced the young man and his family to leave the field, a new missionary arrived. When the young missionary explained to the new missionary his methods for starting the car, the new one opened the hood and began inspecting. "Why," he interrupted, "I believe the only trouble is the loose cable." He gave the cable a twist, pushed the switch, and the engine roared to life. For two years, the young missionary had used his own devices and endured needless trouble. The power to start the car was there all the time- it only needed to be connected.

Shed any lies or attachments: Our goal is to experience the fullness of God's Spirit, but we can only do that if we get rid of the things that distract us or put up a wall between us and the Spirit. God's Spirit wants a clear and undivided path to be able to act freely in and around us, so if we take time to pray and acknowledge to God what we need to be free from, God's Spirit will work from every angle to help us.

Dr. Paul Brand was speaking to a medical college in India on Matthew 5:16: "Let your light so shine before me that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." In front of the lectern was an oil lamp, with its cotton wick burning from the shallow dish of oil. As he preached, the lamp ran out of oil, the wick burned dry, and the smoke made him cough. He immediately used the opportunity. "Some of us here are like this wick," he said. "We're trying to shine for the glory of God, but we stink. That is what happens when we use ourselves as the fuel of our witness rather than the Holy Spirit. Wicks can last indefinitely, burning brightly and without irritating smoke, if the fuel, the Holy Spirit, is in constant supply."

Believe that you are worthy of God's Spirit: Do we really believe we are capable of representing God's Spirit faithfully or do we doubt our ability? We must know that the gifts of knowledge, counsel, faith, fortitude, fear of the Lord (awe), understanding, and wisdom and the fruits of the Spirit are for us; that the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, generosity, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control are for us. God believes we are worthy, but do we believe it?

I have a glove here. The glove cannot do anything by itself, but when my hand is in it, the glove can do many things. True, it is not the glove, but my hand in the glove that acts. We, as Christians, are gloves. It is the Holy Spirit in us, the hand, who does the work. Now, have you ever tried just putting one finger in a glove to make it work: how about four fingers? We must make room for the whole hand so that every finger in the glove is filled. And the palm too.

We have heard a lot today about the need for us to be ROOTED by God's Spirit and I do not think it could have come at a more pressing time. God's Spirit filling every finger slot is the only hope for humanity. Think about it. We are amid an international pandemic forcing us to be further apart than we have ever been before, and for some of us that is really far apart; we are still fighting racism with racism and violence with violence; injustice, anger, war, and greed fill the news airwaves. Yes, it was fascinating to watch the success of the rocket go off yesterday but a thousand rockets going off does not fix what is happening on our streets, in our workplaces, schools, homes, and in our hearts. God's presence and power working through our ancestors throughout history was the only glimmer of light at that time and God's Spirit dwelling in us and moving around us today, in my belief, is our only hope for a true life of purpose, belonging, adventure, and joy.

Rend Collective wrote a song about this:

*You're the only answer to the darkness; You're the only right among the wrong;
You're the only hope among the chaos; You are the voice that calls me on.*

*Louder than every lie; Our sword in every fight; The truth will chase away the night;
Your name is power over darkness; Freedom for the captives; Mercy for the broken and
the hopeless; Your name is faithful in the battle; Glory in the struggle; Mighty it won't let
us down or fail us; Your name is power.*

*I know it is written, hope is certain; I know that the word will never fail; I know that in
every situation; You speak the power to prevail.*

*When you speak you scatter darkness; Light arrives and heaven opens; Holy Spirit, Let us
hear it. When you speak the church awakens; We believe the change is coming; Holy
Spirit, Let us see it.*

*Louder than every lie; Our sword in every fight; The truth will chase away the night;
Your name is power over darkness; Freedom for the captives; Mercy for the broken and
the hopeless; Your name is faithful in the battle; Glory in the struggle; Mighty it won't let
us down or fail us; Your name is power.*

Let all God's people say... Amen.