

REFLECTIONS



PENTECOST

Romans 8:22-27

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies (*body in the the original Gk text*). For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

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THE SPIRIT OF GOD

by
Norm Wright

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. (Gen.1:1-2)

“God is a Spirit” say Jesus in the Gospel of John and “those who worship God must do so in spirit and in truth.” [John 4:24]. The spiritual essence of God is prevalent throughout scripture from Genesis onward.

The Christian celebration of the Feast of Pentecost often treats the Spirit of God as something that came about at that time, serving to fill out what is known as the Holy Trinity, but as we see in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, the Spirit of God was present at the moment of beginning. The Spirit of God is associated and with the creative power of God and it is that creative power that gives relevancy to the experience of the disciples during their celebration of the barley harvest, Judaism’s Pentecost, which in Hebrew is called “Shavuot.”

The Spirit of God’s presence during the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, Shavuot, some two thousand years ago which settled upon the small gathering of the Jewish followers of Jesus while they were celebrating the beginning of the wheat harvest is both symbolic and significant. It is symbolic in that it calls to mind the creative power that brought about all of creation and appeared as a pillar of light that guided the Israelites in darkness of the wilderness. It is significant, in that, the Spirit of God is individualized and shown residing on (within) each of Jesus’ followers, a light to guide them, to enlighten them, and inspire them, marking them as the “harvest,” among the first fruits of God’s new creation, the reclamation and reset of God’s original creative script.

On this Pentecost, our attention is drawn to Paul’s letter to the Romans and his commentary on the Spirit of God which encompasses the entire eighth chapter of Paul’s letter. I invite all who are reading this reflection to read the entire chapter. Paul talks about the Spirit of God in conjunction with the whole of God’s creation coming into full bloom, and being ripe for harvest.

In today’s lesson, Paul says creation is experiencing a pregnancy, referencing its labor pains in the process of giving birth to a new creation. In the original Greek of Paul’s letter this fullness is about a transformation or as Paul puts it, “we wait for adoption, the redemption of **our body**.” Paul is not talking about a physical resurrection, but a reclamation or a transformation of creation to what it is and who we are according to God’s original script of love. Unfortunately, many modern translations translate Paul’s use of “our body” as “our bodies,” which is incorrect. The Greek word Paul used was the singular “*soma*” not the plural “*somata*.” Paul doesn’t subscribe to the resurrection of the physical body but rather to the resurrection of the spiritual body. [See 1 Corinthians 15:42-44] The “our body” being referred to here is a collective sense of the body as the entirety of all creation or what we might refer to as the Body of Christ, which takes in the entire reset of creation.

Early in the eighth chapter of Paul’s letter, he references the Spirit giving life to our mortal bodies; enlivening us as incarnations of God’s presence, to be the collective Body of Christ in the world or as John said in his first letter, to present God’s love in this world. In contemporary lingo Paul says that those who don’t have the Spirit of God in them are like zombies who only appear alive but are in truth dead. Perhaps that’s a bit extreme and I’m not sure God sees anyone that way, but it certainly appeared that way to Paul.

There is a deep sense of intimacy when Paul talks about the Spirit of God. Paul's intimate depiction of the Spirit of God is that of a communicator between the human heart and the heart of God. Paul's depiction of God's Spirit is similar to the description Jesus gave in the Gospel of John; that God's Spirit serves as our advocate. As such, the Spirit of God acts like translator for the things that are too deep for words; things that are expressed through our groans and sighing. In fact, Paul says that the Spirit groans and sighs on our behalf, suggesting that our sighs and groans is a language God understands even when we don't.

There are times when we feel more than we can adequately express in words. Paul is saying that such moments are treated by God's Spirit as prayerful moments; moments in which the Spirit of God intercedes or intercepts our experiences; taking them on as God's experience, acting as a sort of spiritual neurotransmitter. As mentioned in the reflections on John's first letter, God's love makes God vulnerable to the experiences of God's creation, to what we experience.

This doesn't mean we have no need for prayer. On the contrary, prayer is a form of Holy Communion or Holy Communication that brings us into an intentional awareness of God's sympathetic presence in our lives. We do not need to worry about getting our prayers "right;" saying the right things in the right way. Prayer is not about trying to make things sound appealing to God but rather about being honest with God and being honest with ourselves by saying what's on our minds and in our hearts; opening our gut-wrenching and heart-felt feelings to God. It is in prayer that we enter the Holy of Holies, the heart of God; the love of God.

It is in our brother Jesus' dying forgiveness that we find our redemption and what it means to redeem others through following his example. Being in communion with him as the risen Christ and one with him in the rising Christ, we have an experience that same Spirit which descended on him like a dove at his baptism and appeared on the disciples as tongues of fire.

The Spirit of God dwells with us, in us, and around us. The Spirit of God is boundless. It is not subject to our will but rather conforms our will to the will of God. The Spirit of God is the force of God's love, the invisible gravity that binds us together as one with God. The Spirit of God is the driving force of God's will; shaping the course of our being and our lives.

On this day we invite the God's Spirit into our awareness, to be mindful of the Spirit's presence in all that we do and in all that we encounter. God's Spirit enables us to live in hope when all appears hopeless, comforts us when there is little to be comfortable about, and guides us through the flow of life; inspiring us to be the creative children God intended us to be.

Amen.

HYMN

***Come, Holy Spirit, our souls inspire, and lighten
with celestial fire. Thou the anointing Spirit art,
who dost thy sevenfold gifts impart***

***Thy blessed unction from above is comfort, life
and fire of love. Enable with perpetual light
the dullness of our blinded sight.***

(Latin 9th century)