

Once upon a time, a long, long time ago a group of radicals was gathered together in an upstairs room.

While they were praying together a great wind was heard and the Spirit descended upon them and it looked like each had a tongue of fire over their heads. They spoke and sang and praised God with their whole being and rushed out of the room into the crowds sharing with everyone they met the good news of God's wonderful love as shown to them through Jesus. Many were filled with awe and wonder and many came to know and to understand and to love the way of Jesus. About 3000 were welcomed and were baptized that day.

The Spirit of God didn't stop there – oh no! Like a wild goose the Spirit migrated through the Roman Empire and beyond and many who heard came to believe in and love the way of Christ.

However, it didn't take long before divisions emerged. Disputes over style and standards escalated into conflicts over leadership. While some staunchly supported Paul as a founding figure of the church, others contended that Apollos was clearly the superior preacher - notably less prone to emotional outbursts and derogatory remarks toward congregants.

For other individuals, Peter embodied tradition, while Paul was more of a rebel. Huge debates over the attributes of the spirit, the role of the Torah, circumcision and spiritual guidance pitted the new congregations from older more traditionally Jewish congregations.

And yet the Spirit still called over the ages and the flame of the Spirit ignited and spread.

Years passed and the Spirit came up like a bubbling well and flooded the hearts of many as the Word was spoken and finally written down in a language the average literate person in Europe could read. Some of these folks read and then shared and they all delved into the Bible and heard its resounding message.

While not all were learned or influential, they were overflowing with zeal. They encountered a grace that freed them from established religion, and they heard the voice of God through other voices, not just sanctioned by the one church.

However, once the old patterns were dismantled, forging new ones proved challenging. Even the greatest theologians and spiritual thinkers in Europe found themselves at odds. Some aligned with Luther, others with Calvin, and some with Zwingli.

Yet the song of the Spirit of God could not be silenced and sang into the hearts of a group of young radicals who were ardently studying the Gospels. They caught a new vision of the Kingdom of God. Now, they weren't particularly wise or influential, most of them, in fact, were peasants...but they were full of courage. And they carried this Song of the Spirit across the centuries defying, with the cost of their own lives, all the powers that sought to quiet it.

But then at last a day came when they didn't have to hide and some people were so weary from the length of the song, that they stopped singing and walked away. Others decided to use their new-found leisure to quarrel over buttons and to embrace technology just in time to use its forums to call each other ugly names.

Nobody suspected that at this precise moment the Spirit would again move and spread like wildfire. They just suddenly looked up one day and there it was - burning all over the world. And it was exhilarating, and it was alarming, and nobody knew who had control.

And suddenly the air was filled with quiet murmurings. “The church is a place of respectability and decorum.” And “No one with a working ear or brain could worship to music like that” and “I can't believe they let THAT person into the church.” and “I don't want **her** to be the face of our church” and “I'm not sure I want our flame on a stand that looks like that” and “How can I call them my sibling in Christ when they think THAT!”

And it may have all come to blows if they hadn't all been pacifists - restricted in their methods to passive aggressive measures like the ban and the silent treatment.

Sounds familiar, no? The bad news is that we have a problem. The good news is that history repeats itself and we have never been the first or only ones to have problems.

Our Bible is full of stories – our history is full of stories of how well-meaning people eventually got it wrong and ALWAYS God reached out a hand – the Son – the Spirit to lead people back to God in new and surprising ways.

God's Spirit is not only a calm campfire or a cup of cool water on a hot day. God's spirit is like wildfire – it can jump the barriers that we set up to contain it – it smokes and smolders long after the flame is no longer visible. Or the Spirit is like water – nurturing new life, filling up low dry places - destroying barriers and boundaries and making new geographies as when it floods through with cataclysmic force. God's Spirit is like a wild goose – going where it pleases – fierce and wild and free. God's Spirit is like a Song – sometimes slow and methodical– other times tremendous and great and other times so sweet it'll make you weep.

But still the Spirit moves and still the Spirit calls and builds up the body of Christ. And the Spirit will move as it will. We read in Isaiah 43: 18-19 ¹⁹ “I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?”

The Church in Galatia was, like us, struggling with interpreting the Spirit in their midst. You see, the church in Galatia, like ours in North America, was bombarded by different messages especially with regard to interpreting the signs of the Spirit.

Jewish Christian teachers came and said that strict observance to the outward signs, like circumcision and celebrating of Jewish festivals, the observance of Sabbath and keeping the laws of the Torah would guarantee and indicate a connection to Holy.

However, Paul knew that abiding in God infected the heart of a person and of a community to such an extent that the old laws became inconsequential when held to the light of the love of God. This is what he defined as freedom in Christ. It is, in essence, being filled with the Spirit of God.

Eugene Peterson's “The Message,” Paul, in Galatians 5:13-15 wrote, “It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don't use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that's how freedom grows.

For everything we know about God's Word is summed up in a single sentence:
Love others as you love yourself.

That's an act of true freedom.

If you bite and ravage each other, watch out—in no time at all you will be annihilating each other, and where will your precious freedom be then?"

But what is freedom without love? What is freedom from the Law without the Spirit alive and loving within you? It is shown in those who, out of lust or greed or just plain self-unawareness embrace their indulgences. What does this look like? It looks like this list – again from Galatians 5: 19-21 from The Message:

“It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time:
repetitive, loveless, cheap sex;
a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage;
frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness;
trinket gods;
magic-show religion;
paranoid loneliness;
cutthroat competition;
all-consuming-yet-never-satisfied wants;
a brutal temper;
an impotence to love or be loved;
divided homes and divided lives;
small-minded and lopsided pursuits;
the vicious habit of depersonalizing everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions;
ugly parodies of community. I could go on.”

But we know what freedom in Christ – in the LOVE of Christ looks like. We know what God's Spirit – which is ever calling us to new life – we know what the Spirit of God ignites in our hearts. And that is love.

Always when the Spirit burns through a people or a person or a community, the Spirit brings gifts into our lives – much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard.

In verses 22-23 from the Message, we read that these gifts include:

“things like affection for others,
exuberance about life,
serenity.
We develop a willingness to stick with things,
a sense of compassion in the heart,
and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people.
We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments,
not needing to force our way in life,
able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.”
In other words, the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
gentleness and self control.”

Paul continues:

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The Spirit Moves Still
Selections from Galatians 5:1-6:8

Emily Toews

“Since this is the kind of life we have chosen, the life of the Spirit, then let us make sure that we do not just hold it as an idea in our heads or a sentiment in our hearts but work out its implications in every detail of our lives.

That means we will not compare ourselves with each other as if one of us were better and another worse. We have far more interesting things to do with our lives. Each of us is an original.

Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore that person, saving your critical comments for yourself. *You* might be needing forgiveness before the day’s out. Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ’s law. If you think you are too good for that, well, then you’ve been badly deceived.

Don’t be misled: No one makes a fool of God. What you plant, you sew. The person who plants selfishness, ignoring the needs of others—ignoring God! —harvests a crop of weeds. All they’ll have to show for their life is weeds! But the one who plants in response to God, letting God’s Spirit do the growing work, harvests a crop of real life, eternal life.”

Friends. Today we celebrate the day God’s Spirit came to the disciples at Pentecost like a mighty wind.

The Spirit isn’t stagnant – it puffs and blows all over the world in gales and hurricanes, tornados, and small breezes. God’s spirit knocks down our pine trees of pride and blows our silos of self-entitlement into our neighbour’s trees. God’s Spirit dances with uninhibited joy through the stifling halls of propriety – releasing the tongues of those shut-up by shame.

God’s Spirit calls out ALWAYS in love, “WELCOME! COME! SEE! I’m about to do something new! See, it is about to spring forth! Can you not perceive it?”