

The Holy Spirit: Gathers and Scatters

June 5, 2022 Pentecost Sunday

Acts 2:1-21

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Grand Rapids MI

I would imagine that many of us have experienced a few if not several spiritual traditions over the years. For me I was raised Roman Catholic and was very devout but in my teenage years. I met people from another church and attended an independent charismatic church called Jesus People Church that I eventually joined. I went to Germany and was involved in a German Charismatic church, which although similar did give me a different spiritual experience. When I returned to Minnesota I attended an Assemblies of God church and college for my undergrad degree. As I wrestled with my orientation I once again searched for a church that would help me come to terms with that and help me love myself again, because the theology in the evangelical church like the Assemblies of God was dangerous to my person, to be quite frank about it.

So I went on a tour of several churches; United Methodist, ELCA Lutheran, Episcopal, even the Metropolitan Community Church which was started by a former Assemblies of God Minister who was gay, Troy Perry. I even explored my old Catholic roots again at a popular Catholic parish in Minneapolis called St. Joan of Arc Church.

Finally, a Lutheran minister friend of mine at the time said, “you know you should really check out the United Church of Christ church. I heard that Lyndale UCC is really good.” Well I had never even heard of the UCC or

Lyndale church even though I had driven by it often. So one Sunday I went to church and felt at home finally.

Several years later, as I was finishing up my ordination process, I was asked by one of the associate conference ministers Mary Kay Sauter, after hearing my long spiritual journey to the UCC, “what do you carry with you from each of those spiritual homes that you bring to your ministry today?” I gave it a thought and said, “From the Catholic church I cherish the celebration of mystery and awe of God. From the Charismatic church and the Assemblies of God it is the Power and beauty of the Holy Spirit I found there. And in the UCC it is the wrestling with the questions of life through faith seeking justice and healing for the world.”

I love the concept of faith as a journey with and in pursuit of God. Just as one walking a hiking trail and you experience a variety of paths that may challenge you, give you a chance to catch your breath or a view that can take your breath away, so is our faith journey. Through it all we have a companion with us that we call the Spirit of God or the Holy Spirit.

In the Gospels we watch the disciples walk with Jesus and learn from him about the principles and values of the Kingdom of God. But now as Jesus’ ministry on the earth is ending a new era of faith is emerging for the disciples but they do not quite know what to expect. So they follow Jesus’ command to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit to come. All they know is that it will be a power and that their mission will be to share their testimony of faith with the world once that has happened. We read this in the first chapter of Acts.

But as we hear in Romans this bearing witness is not just for us to the world, it is also from the spirit of God to us about God and who we are because of Jesus.

Let me read that to you again from Romans 8:14-16 "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!". It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

It is that deep sense of kinship, belonging to the family of God that is part of the significant work of the Holy Spirit. There is a difference between being religious and being spiritually connected to God. The markers of that are the spirit of fear and slavery, as Paul calls it here in Romans, vs. the spirit of adoption which is a sense of deep belonging and identity.

In my spiritual journey I was seeking a new spiritual home where I would finally be able to be my true self, all of who I am and know that I would be loved. I think that is what all of us seek on our spiritual journey. I believe the God gathers us together in communities of faith to help us know that we are part of God's family and are loved. I trust that the Holy Spirit is at work in people's lives leading them to a deeper walk with God and hopefully to a loving and caring community of faith that will support them in their journey of faith.

According to Acts the disciples, some 120 people, were gathered together waiting for the Holy Spirit. Did you ever wonder what they did? They spent time together, they prayed often, they even took care of a little business of

replacing Judas. I would imagine they retold the stories of their experiences with Jesus. They reflected on all that they had heard and seen and learned.

Then on the day of Pentecost the power of the Spirit came down and it gathered another group of people. People who were devout, curious, seekers of God and as the disciples poured out of the upper room onto the street the gathered crowd heard familiar sounds. Words in their mother tongues. Words that resonated with their own hearts and made them feel at home.

The disciples shared, with the help of the Holy Spirit, their experiences of Jesus in their lives. They gave testimony to all who had ears to hear this good news. The spirit scattered the disciples out onto the streets like a wind blowing the seeds of a tree far and wide seeking open and willing hearts who could hear and recognize the language of faith they were proclaiming. In turn these people also carried with them the seed of faith that would grow and spread to others. This is the work of the Holy Spirit still today.

On our journey of faith, God's spirit guides us and gathers us with other kindred of faith to share our lives with one another. We come together to grow, celebrate God in our lives, to pray and wait expectantly for the winds of the Spirit to blow through our lives, scattering us out among others who are curious seekers of God. There are many different kinds of winds of the spirit. My question to you is "are you ready to be scattered by the spirit in order to touch the lives of others who are seeking." Are you willing to let the winds of the spirit carry you to others who need a fresh wind of love in their lives too?"