



THE DAY OF PENTECOST
JUNE 9, 2019
ROMANS 8: 14-17
“SEEING SPIRITUALLY”

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, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

- Aren't we all familiar with various kinds of spirits: School spirit. Spirits as paranormal ghosts. Liquor, beer, and wine as spirits. Demonic spirits. Team spirit. The spirit of '76.
- And we all are aware of God as Father and God as Son. But when it comes to the Holy Spirit, it seems like the Spirit is our second cousin twice removed.
- I think of the boy riding his bike outside a church. The priest saw him and told him to come into the church. The boy protested, “But they'll steal my bike!” The priest explained that the Holy Spirit would take care of it, so they went inside. The priest showed the boy how to make the sign of the cross, “In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.”
- The priest asked the boy to repeat it and he said, “In the name of the Father and the Son. Amen.”
- The priest asked, “What happened to the Holy Spirit?”
- “Outside watching my bike.”
- Often it appears that the Holy Spirit **has** been left outside the church.
- Think back on the Sunday when you voted on whether or not to call me as Pastor.
- Was it just a popularity contest? I like him. I don't like him.
- Did anyone ask “Regardless of my opinion, what does the Holy Spirit desire for CLC?”

- Did anybody think “The guy is a jerk but, even as interim pastor, the congregation is attracting new members, new ministries are forming, positive changes are occurring which likely are signs of the Spirit moving among us. So maybe I need to ask what the Holy Spirit wants.”
- Did anyone think, “He’s a good guy, but the Spirit tells me he’s not right for CLC.”
- In the Old Testament *ruach* is the Hebrew word for Spirit and in New Testament Greek *pneuma*: breath or breath of a god or breath of life.
- Spirit is right here. As close to us as our breath or is it our very breath?
- If so, then the issue is whether or not we are paying attention. Which, again, is the root meaning of the word *religion*: to take into careful attention.
- Since the Holy Spirit is the third person of the triune God, let’s look at three lenses for the Spirit on earth.
- Images and symbols tell us more than words.
- By the way, this is one of the reasons contemporary churches use screens and television monitors. The power of the image. In reminding you that the primary symbols—images—of the Holy Spirit are wind, fire, and birds, I could be showing you images of powerful winds, flocks of birds, and consuming fire. Much more impactful than just the words wind, bird, fire.
- All three are outside our control. Wind blows where it wants. Fire consumes hundreds of acres of woodlands unabated. Birds build a nest in my gutter without my permission.
- Mary Oliver, in her poem, **Whistling Swans**, writes:
 - Do you bow your head when you pray or do you look up into that blue space?
Take your choice, prayers fly from all directions
And don’t worry about what language you use,
God no doubt understands them all.
Even when the swans are flying north and making
Such a ruckus of noise, God is surely listening
And understanding.

Rumi said there is no proof of the soul.
But isn't the return of spring and how it
Springs up in our hearts a pretty good hint?
Yes, I know God's silence never breaks, but is
That really a problem?
There are thousands of voices, after all
And furthermore, don't you imagine (I just suggest it)
That the swans know about as much as we do about
The whole business?
So listen to them and watch them, singing as they fly.
Take from it what you can.

- Do we really want the presence of the Holy Spirit? Where we have to **really listen** to something and someone other than ourselves? Perhaps not. Maybe we prefer to just live by our opinions....
- When we moved to Pittsburgh the last thing I thought about was parish ministry. Ask Deb. I wanted to work at the deli counter at Kuhn's in Ingomar. I wanted to kick back, let somebody else be the boss and call out number 53, then slice the honey ham. Half pound or a pound?
- But the Holy Spirit blew in another direction. Outside of my conscious control. Calling like the swans overhead. Listening and watching. Taking from it what I could. And so here I am....
- Through the ages, the Holy Spirit has three manifestations.
- The first was through the people of Israel. A nation. A covenant between God and the people. The Spirit working through a collective agreement. God putting the law into the hearts of an entire people. Marriage seen as a metaphor for God and the people. Israel as the wife of Yahweh.
- Then comes Christianity where the universal church and local congregation is the expression of the spirit. That great passage of love in First Corinthians is not written about marriage. For Paul, this is to be the expression of the Spirit in a local congregation: love is patient. Love is kind. Love is not envious, boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way....

- We are now in a time where the Spirit manifests and uses individuals as it wills. The Spirit is no longer only recognizable in some congregations but in persons in every sphere of life.
- Recently, Rachel Held Evans died at the age of thirty-seven. Raised in a conservative evangelical church, she was an apostle to outsiders. Her blog and books helped countless people find their way out of a narrow, constrictive Christianity to one more expansive and compassionate. In writing about her death, one woman wrote: “I was once one of the outsiders. A convert to Christianity decades ago, I joined the church in part because I found the gospel included all sorts of oddballs and marginal characters. Jesus seemed to welcome them with particular warmth.
- But as the years rolled by, I began to realize that many churches, concerned with their own survival, are often more risk-averse than the local savings and loan, and less friendly than the neighborhood bar. I know people who have walked out of church because they never found the church relevant to their deepest questions and struggles.”
- The spirit moves through the words of Rachel Held Evans.
- The Spirit is setting on fire sixteen-year-old Greta Thunberg, a Swedish climate activist. She has Asberger’s syndrome, OCD, and mutism, but stands before world leaders and demands they act.
- She writes, “I am here to say “Our house is on fire.” Adults keep saying, “We owe it to our young people to give them hope.” But I don’t want your hope. I don’t want you to be hopeful. I want you to panic. I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. And then I want you to act.”
- Eight teenagers in the confirmation class at First United Methodist Church in Omaha stood before the congregation on Confirmation Sunday and read a statement saying they did not want to become members. They took their stand on principle because they believed their denomination’s vote to uphold and strengthen their ban on LGBTQ ordination and marriage to be “unjust” and “immoral.” They received a standing ovation from the congregation.
- My own daughter, Alayna, internalized the Spirit from her years in the pew and has taken it to the streets to fight for the poor, the marginalized, and the powerless. And gotten demonized for it. The demon daughter of the demon Pastor, I guess....

- The Spirit is unleashed throughout the world, now in individual and personal expressions of the crucified Christ. It seems God is asking each of us to be in touch with the Holy Spirit and find the motivation to serve the creation and its people in need....
- We can also think of three ways of seeing.
- There is rational seeing. A logical perspective derived from principles. For example, “I think therefore I am.”
- There is materialistic seeing, based on what our senses tell us. “This is a pulpit. You are sitting on a pew.”
- And there is spiritual seeing. Symbolized by the third eye in the middle of the forehead. Spiritual seeing claims that reality cannot be defined only by what the mind and senses tell us.
- Spiritual seeing cannot be rationally proved. The wind blows where it wills. Take what you can from the noise of the swans overhead. Spiritual seeing simply witnesses to a reality that is beyond the senses and the rational mind. I know because I know because I know.
- Faith is pure awareness. A conscious and willing openness to a knowing beyond ego that may initially frighten us because who knows what spiritual seeing will show us and want from us. Certainly, more than our meager opinions.
- And, I’ll tack on for good measure perhaps the greatest expression of the Spirit: freedom.
- Paul writes, “You did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear.”
- Throughout the New Testament, the scriptures juxtapose faith/freedom and fear.
- Fear (or anxiety) is a terrible motivator. Indeed, fear is the anti-motivator. Whoever did anything worthwhile from a spirit of fear?
- Freedom means that in every situation there are at least two choices. Otherwise, we live in the fear that there is only one right choice and we’d better make it.

- Freedom led your Congregational Council to adopt a new perspective toward our invested funds. A spirit of fear would say “Don’t touch that money because we want to pay the bills to keep the doors open even if there are only fifteen people in the pews.” And I do know of congregations with eight people on Sunday morning because of some huge endowment. In the freedom bestowed by the Holy Spirit, our Congregational Council decided that we will use our resources to either build a vibrant, lively spirit-filled congregation or go down swinging.
- God gives us the freedom to make mistakes. We all learn much more from our messes, missteps and mistakes than from doing it right every time.
- From our Sunday night Worship Service we learned that it did not attract younger generations. Wrong day, wrong time, and wrong kind of service.
- We went back to the drawing board. New day, new time, new musicians, and a different style music. Get ready to move and groove.
- Maybe it will fail too. So what? We all need to take the pressure off of getting it right in whatever we do.
- Abraham Lincoln did not speak until age four and did not speak fluently until age 9. His teachers told his parents he was slow and would not amount to much.
- From 1831 to 1854 he lost his job, was defeated for state legislature, lost his fiancé, had a nervous breakdown, lost again for state legislature, was twice defeated for Congress, defeated for the senate (twice) and defeated for vice-president.
- The paralyzing fantasy of perfection and getting it right keeps us obedient little boys and girls. Freedom in the Spirit grows us up into mature adults.
- Take on the risk of listening and watching the singing swans as they fly overhead, so that the Spirit of God soars into our individual lives and our life together here at CLC.
- SERMON SONG: **ONE OF US** BY JOAN OSBOURNE