

## MAY THE SPIRIT BE WITH YOU!



### *Scripture:*

### **Romans 8:22-27**

<sup>22</sup>We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; <sup>23</sup>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.

<sup>24</sup>For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? <sup>25</sup>But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

<sup>26</sup>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. <sup>27</sup>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.

### **Acts 2:1-21**

<sup>1</sup>When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>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. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

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

<sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup>'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.

<sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. <sup>19</sup>And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. <sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. <sup>21</sup>Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

**This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!**



## THINGS ARE HAPPENIN' HERE!

The Holy Spirit is in the house! Can you feel it?

Our Presbytery of the Redwoods quarterly meeting was held here last Friday and one of the pastors told me she could feel the Spirit swirling in this place! She was impressed with our worship service, our music, our new carpet, and all the activities and programs she could see we are engaged in by looking at our bulletin board displays in Bowen Hall. She said, "Things are happenin' here!" You all are part of the flow of the Holy Spirit inspiring us to do the work of God here in this community and beyond. You are clothed with power from on high to do things on behalf of God that you could never dream possible. Like those early disciples who were empowered by the Holy Spirit to continue the work of Jesus on earth. The Pentecost Spirit is for you!

Barbara Brown Taylor, (one of my favorite preachers), says the disciples, before Pentecost, were dense timid bumbling who were hiding at the least sign of trouble. After Pentecost, they were fearless leaders. They healed the sick, and went to jail gladly singing hymns until the walls fell down. Their transformation was beyond our imagination. Yet, it is recorded in the history books, how they spread the Good News of God's love.

The disciples, women and men, waited in that upper room praying because Jesus had told them to do so. But they had no idea what the advocate and counselor, Holy Spirit's power was going to be! They probably imagined an Obi Wan Kenobi like person to walk in the room, with wisdom to share and leadership skills to teach.

## WINDS AND TONGUES OF FIRE

Instead, they got wind and tongues of fire! What a shock! The whole spectacle was so loud it drew a crowd who assumed their behavior was a sign they had drunk too much wine, even though it was still morning!

Peter helped the crowd understand what was going on by connecting the Pentecost spectacle to the ancient scriptures, starting in Joel 2:28-32. Those who went to Hebrew school would have known what that passage said. Peter basically quoted it word for word. They would have also recalled that the Pentecost wind was like the wind that revived the valley of the dry bones, and the fire was like the Spirit Fire that led Israel through the desert. The various languages spoken would have reminded them of the Tower of Babel in the Old Testament.

So, after the crowd understood the connection to the stories in their sacred texts, three-thousand wanted to be baptized by the disciples that day! Peter must have been very convincing!

So how will we go out and help people understand the power of the Holy Spirit when we leave this Pentecost celebration today? What will you do?

## FAITH

Everyone has a yearning and a deep need for faith in some form or other. PBS did a special a few years ago called Faith and the Brain. They promoted the idea that spiritual faith practices are beneficial to your brain and the benefits can be measured. They quoted research by Andrew Newberg who studied CT scans of people's brains on and off prayer and meditation practices. Dr. Newberg also interviewed the test subjects on how starting regular spiritual practices changed their lives.

Many of the meditation and prayer subjects felt they were doing better at their jobs and felt a deeper sense of peace within. Newberg concluded that Religion and spirituality helps to lessen feelings of depression, and anxiety. The research also showed that faith provided meaning in life which enhanced the ability to cope with life stressors.

Do you believe it? Do you agree? Then are you sharing your faith practice with your friends and family so they can benefit from it, too?

**Some say, oh, I don't want to push my beliefs on others. But if you found a vitamin or a good diet, or a new method of exercise that really made a difference in your life for the better, wouldn't you share that information with your friends? I'm not promoting evangelizing with a purpose to convert. I am proposing you think of creative ways to share what you know has been helpful to you in your life with others in a way that shows you care and want them to have a chance for a healthier life, too.**

That doesn't mean you say they have to come here to church with you. But you can invite them and share how you have found more peace in your life from daily prayer (if that is true for you.)

## PRAYER

A friend of mine told me he had an ability to be more objective and less emotional at his insurance company if he prayed in the morning before he went to work. When he forgot to pray he felt a big difference in the way he handled the chaos that came up during the day. He now teaches centering prayer to anyone who will listen.

Over the years, some of my friends have inspired my faith with their personal stories about feeling a sense of God's love despite horrible family tragedies. They prayed during riots, hurricanes and tornados and felt

God controlling their fears and supporting them in their grief. Some were survivors of the Joplin Missouri Level Five tornado. Another was a friend named Mary in Kenya who survived seeing her husband, in-laws and two children murdered in front of her and still she felt God's presence supporting her.

## YOU HAVE A STORY TO TELL

You have a story to tell and God wants you to tell it. Maybe not to convert people to your exact way of believing, but to share the fruits of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, compassion, and self-control. These are all the ingredients for a well-lived life.

Faith in God comes from beyond. It is not manmade. It was embedded in our DNA and infused into our subconscious. However, I believe that God doesn't want us to all be robots and non-thinking Christian soldiers who follow an exact regime. God wants us to tap into the Holy Spirit's power within and let that loving force work in our lives with and for the benefit of others using the gifts and talents you have been blessed with.

If we don't share our stories of faith or don't share the benefits of a spiritual life and point people to the grace we have been blessed with, then they will seek it elsewhere because our brains are all hungry and thirsty for something to believe in.

## JEDI-ISM

They might even find faith in a Hollywood fad like Star Wars. The Pacific Standard news magazine reported in an article by Ben Rowen, about a Jedi Faithful national conference held in Baltimore in 2017. Rowen said that at the conference they discussed how to live a way of life faithful to the Jedi way of the Force. They talk of themselves as inheritors of the Force in the way Christians are called "inheritors of the Spirit who have been adopted by God our Parent creator and sustainer."

Even though I love Star Wars, I still believe that Jesus is a much more solid faith role model to imitate than Yoda is. But those who follow Yoda and call themselves the Jedi Faithful are following many of the same moral tenets as our Christian faith.

The plots in the Star Wars stories reflect upon self-sacrificial love and the powers of the Force are described as working like the power of the Holy Spirit. Yet many people watching the movies miss these connections to our faith because we have failed to explain the basic spiritual tenets of what we believe to the public. Instead, we have allowed the extreme conservative branch of Christianity to promote exclusivity and elitism, which is foundationally anti-Christian.

In their workshop attended by the Pacific News reporter, the Jedi-ism faithful were learning how to use the force like a collective thought power to influence exter-

nal changes in the Cosmos. This religion started back in 2001 with an email campaign to Star Wars fans. As a result of that outreach, five-hundred-fifty-thousand people around the world joined the Jedi faithful and now currently identify their religious preference as "Jedi."



George Lucas, who self identifies as a Buddhist/Christian Methodist, was not happy that the "Jedi Faithful" were forming a religion based on his Star Wars creation. So he sued them for using the term Jedi. Now they call the religion Jedi-ism.

The article says that among other moral principles, the Jedi-ism members try to serve others for the benefit of the world. Sound familiar? Here is an example of the philosophy they follow from the movie.

(A video was shown to the congregation.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlRTWxRNR1w&feature=youtu.be>

God intends for us all to tap into the force of the Holy Spirit for faith, reassurance of God's loving presence, and for a sense of purpose that we are created to promote love, life, peace, hope, and joy.

Those who cling on to the idea of the Jedi Force are looking for a way to deal with their fear and anxiety that they are alone, weak, and unable to deal with the chaos in this world.

Eternal life is even in the Jedi philosophy of death. In one of the booklets guiding the formation of this faith it reads: "There is no ignorance; there is knowledge. There is no passion; there is serenity. There is no death; there is the Force."

The Jedi Creed is essentially just an adaptation of the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi with the term "Jedi" substituted for "divine master."

There are also reflections on Buddhism such as an instruction to not be overly attached to material things, and the promotion of self-improvement.

As a result of the new appeal of Jedi-ism, there are more people who declare their religion to be Jedi-ism than there are devotees of Scientology in the United Kingdom.

**Sadly, many of the Jedi faithful report that they previously identified their faith as Christian. But they came into conflict with some elements of their faith such as non-inclusiveness and a conflict between the Christian faith and science such as a denial of global warming.**

One Jedi they interviewed said he attended a protestant seminary and from there became a Jedi because they accepted all of his cultural identities as: gay, Latino, a Chicagoan, and a Star Wars fan. He didn't feel Christianity could accept him for who he authentically was.

Also, their wealthiest supporter from Texas said he joined the Jedi faithful because he didn't agree with the Catholic Church that women could not be priests and that it was a sin to use birth control. So he discarded his Catholic faith for the Jedi faith that felt more compassionate and theologically practical. He is building a monastery called Temple of the Jedi Order.

### **SPREAD THE TRUE VISION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH**

The Holy Spirit is calling you today to take some of the power from the tongues of fire and spread the true vision of the Christian faith.

If you tune in and listen, there is an inner voice telling you there is something to believe in greater than yourself. There is something that has the miraculous power to create a precious complex being such as you. The original force that interweaves the universe connecting us all to past, present, and future, and to one another exists still today: A Holy Spirit force that promotes peace, goodwill, love, compassion, and charity despite the evil that also exists in the world. There is a real Holy Spirit force that helps us discern right from wrong, moral from immoral and inspires us to risk our lives for the benefit of others because by doing so we are saved from the evil of selfish greed and isolationism.

All of us hunger and thirst for something to believe in beyond our selves. But the Holy Spirit will not impose itself. The Spirit often doesn't come as a wind of fire on Pentecost. It usually waits until someone is ready and humble and willing to seek God.

So love your friends and family enough to share your story of what you know about the love of Jesus. With the help of the Holy Spirit you can inspire them with a strong true faith by showing them Christ's love in action. Be brave. Embrace the tongues of fire from the Holy Spirit and use your tongue to share your faith with others. Trust that the Holy Spirit will help you when you pray and the real true force of the Trinity, the three in one, will be with you always! Amen.

#### **Benediction:**

**Reflecting upon the Prayer of the Holy Spirit by St. Augustine:**

**May you breathe in the Holy Spirit.**

**May all your thoughts be holy.**

**May the Holy Spirit act in you, so that your work may be holy.**

**May you love what is holy, be strengthened by and defend all that is holy, and be guarded by what is holy, so that through the power of the Holy Spirit, you may rest in peace. Amen**

**And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen**



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