

Fired Up (Acts 2.1-4)

by Rev. Dr. Durrell Watkins, Senior Pastor
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Late in life my great-aunt Gladys became a fan of Norman Vincent Peale and started following his example of saying positive things to herself to increase her faith. Affirmations we call them, but I don't think she really understood how to use them. I found these affirmations tucked away in her bible. She had written, "God's angels guard me, but still I carry mace." "Today I will share my counsel and advice freely, because nothing is sweeter than saying, 'I told you so.'" "I will laugh today at as many people as possible."

My spiritual journey has been a winding road, rarely dull, and very fulfilling. It has taken from Catholicism through the Charismatic Renewal movement to the Episcopal Church and finally to MCC. Along the way I explored Unitarian Universalism, Religious Science, and even Buddhism. And, I became a fan of Methodist turned Dutch Reformed minister Norman Vincent Peale and some of the New Thought philosophers who influenced him.

But it was Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) that exposed me to the most ecumenical worship experience of my life...where Baptists and Catholics and Pentecostals and Wesleyans and Unitarians and Jews and Buddhists and Mormons and Anglicans and Presbyterians and New Agers and others all get together, and worship together, and like one another (for the most part), and are free to discuss and have various view points on almost any imaginable theological position; where the free and open sharing inspires growth and experimentation...where Baptists begin to cross themselves and Catholics start to raise their hands in praise. Such radical and inclusive ecumenism can only be a movement of the Spirit.

MCC has allowed me to test and prove Jesus' words, "seek and you will find."

In my honest, open exploration of spirituality, I have found the life-giving spirit of hope and love every place where two or more fellow seekers have gathered with open minds and hearts. I have discovered the spirit blows where she will, and is not limited by creed or culture, doctrine or dogma.

I have experienced the Presence in which we all live and move and have our being to be endlessly responsive, willing to appear in whatever way I might be willing to experience. I have found the Omnipresent Reality to be just that...omni-present...everywhere, part of everything, inclusive of all life, leaving no one out for any reason.

Pentecost was a harvest festival, so in Acts Luke is talking about a Jewish feast day already long in existence. But on this Pentecost, something new happens: "¹When the day of Pentecost had come, they were **all** together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it **filled the entire house** where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested **on each of them**. ⁴**All of them were filled with the holy Spirit** and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."

Isn't that the way it ought to be? People coming together, using different religious vocabularies, symbols, and stories, but ALL being fired up, energized by the wind of the spirit that fills the whole house, the whole world, leaving no one out. It's an exciting story...and it is our story today.

One of the things that I love about this Pentecost experience as Luke imagines it in the book of Acts, is that it is a story that has been building throughout our scriptures, and it continues throughout our lives.

When Luke imagines weaves Pentecost narrative, he affirms the sacredness of diversity. There is a diversity of speech and a unity of purpose, and when people begin to embrace the power of this diversity, the power of speaking in new and inclusive ways...ways that welcome women, ways

that welcome same-gender loving people, ways that welcome racial and ethnic diversity, ways that welcome religious diversity, ways that welcome transgender people, ways that allow God to be seen as more than a celebration of maleness but as the all-embracing Love in whose image all people are made...when the church learns to speak the seemingly new language of inclusion, the experience is powerful like a wind blowing through the house or like bursts of flames appearing in the air: Powerful, scary, disturbing, dangerous, renewing, life-giving, miraculous.

Elijah, the prophet of God, is whisked away to another world in 2 Kings 2, but his disciple, Elisha, receives the spirit of the prophet. This was confirmed by other prophets who declared, "The spirit of Elijah is resting on Elisha." The spirit of God, through the prophet of God, continues to be active in the life of a follower of the prophet. Luke repeats this theme, but instead of one disciple receiving the spirit, everyone gets the gift!

The Psalmist prays, "Do not banish me from your presence; do not deprive me of your holy Spirit" (Psalm 51.11). Luke says, the Spirit is not withheld from us...it's too powerful to be withheld, it's like a mighty rushing wind, it fills the entire room; it fills every person.

The prophet Joel imagines God saying, "...I will pour out my spirit on all humankind." Luke shares that vision today.

The prophet Ezekiel has a dream about skeletons, representing his own people who feel tired and exhausted from years of oppression. And in his dream, he hears the question, "Can these bones live again?" And Ezekiel continues to dream that he prophesies to the wind, saying, "*Approach from the four winds, Breath, and breathe on these...that they may live.*" And in his dream, the bones come to life, and God says to Ezekiel, "I will raise you up, my people...I will put my spirit into you and you will return to life..." Ez. 37. Luke seems to believe that prophecy has come true on the day of Pentecost, or at least he hopes it has come true and believes that it can.

In Ephesians we read, "The church is Christ's body; it's the fullness of the One who fills all creation" (1.23). Luke is suggesting that God is filling the church, its individual members, as well as the whole earth with the spirit of life and vitality. This is a story that is being told over and over in scripture, and Luke brings it together in a very dramatic way.

Luke, familiar with most or maybe even all of these stories, seems to weave them together to help fire up his community to be all they can be and to dare to at least try to change their world.

Luke imagines Jesus ascending on the breath of the spirit, like Elijah, to the eternal presence of God, and returning at Pentecost as the spirit giving life to his new body, the church.

As Elijah ascended to the heavens and his spirit descended on Elisha, Luke imagines Jesus ascending to the heavens and his spirit descending on his followers.

The psalmist prayed for a continual experience of God's spirit. Luke imagines that prayer being answered with the spirit of Christ filling every person.

Joel could imagine a day when God's spirit would enfold every person, regardless of gender, social class or status; Luke can imagine that such a day has already arrived.

When Ezekiel's people felt defeated and lifeless, he dreamed of the divine Breath filling them and renewing them. When Luke's people are feeling defeated and lifeless, he, too, dreams of the Breath of God, the wind of God, filling and renewing them and sending them out to help and heal others.

For Luke, the Ascension, Pentecost, and the Parousia (or return of Christ) seem to be all one story, the story of the spirit at work in OUR lives here and now. Luke says Jesus was empowered by spirit, and by following Jesus' example we are the ones to continue his healing, inclusive, life-

affirming message. Christ has returned to us *as us*, by the power of the spirit, and we are now the hands, the body of Christ meant to bring hope and healing to our world.

We are filled with God's spirit and therefore, we are the resurrected, always present, body of Christ. Christ returns every time we follow in the footsteps of Jesus to comfort the sick, offer hope to the suffering, speak truth to power, demand justice and equality for all, extend forgiveness to others, not because they deserve it but because they need it, and because we need to be free in ways that only forgiveness makes possible.

Luke is saying the Jesus story is our story. It's time to embrace it, to let it fire us up so that the spirit of divine living can work through us to bring hope and healing to a world that still needs it very much. The spirit has not overlooked us, has not passed us by. In fact, it is here right now! Don't you feel the wind of encouragement? Don't you sense the flames of possibility? The spirit is here to fire us up and to do great things through us...US. This is the good news. Amen.

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**The Spirit of Life energizes me.
The Spirit of Love gives me peace.
The Spirit of Joy makes me happy.
The Spirit of Hope gives me strength.
The Spirit of Christ dwells in me.
And so it is!**

"Life's blows cannot break a person whose spirit is warmed at the fire of enthusiasm." Dr. Norman Vincent Peale