

It is the spirit that gives life, while the flesh is of no avail. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life. John 6.63 (NAB)

Where the Spirit of Our God Is
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In life, so much of what we do is limited by habits, customs, traditions, restrictions, rituals and yes, even religious beliefs. We have speed limits. We are encouraged to set healthy limits and proper boundaries in our professional and personal relationships. Our bodies can't live much beyond 100 years under the most ideal of circumstances. And even if we are fortunate enough to live to a happy old age, we may still have to deal with illnesses that are chronic, and in some ways limiting. A person with asthma doesn't want to be without her inhaler. A diabetic may need to have insulin at the ready. Many of us are dependent on eye glasses or hearing aids to be able to see and hear as well as we want to.

Some professions have mandatory retirement ages. Most professions have training and qualifications that must be met before one can be certified in that profession. With so many limitations in life, where is the spirit of God that is said to be limitless, moving where she will?

We have many blessings in our lives, and we also have very real needs. We need clean air and water, shelter, and food. We need love, and affirmation. We need community. We need opportunity. We need hope.

Of course, though our needs are universal, some of us find that there are limitations when we try to get our needs met. For many, race has been a barrier to achieving all that we all want and need. For some, gender has placed a glass ceiling on upward mobility. Sexual orientation has limited some who wanted to serve in the military, in the teaching professions, in the clergy, or who just wanted to marry the person they loved. Some have bypassed those barriers by being dishonest about who they are...and that has placed the added limitation of never being able to live out loud, freely and proud. Knowing that prejudice has placed unfair limitations in many lives, again we might ask, "where is the spirit of God?"

Now, don't get me wrong: the awareness of limitations in and of itself is not a bad thing. Knowing what we can and cannot do, or at least what is or is not going to be easy, is actually good information to have. Knowing the obstacles is the first step to overcoming them. Knowing that some have broken through the barriers reminds us that the barriers exist, but also that the barriers may not be the end of the story.

In the face of our current global economy, environmental concerns, CEO incentives that still run unchecked, financial bailouts, home foreclosures, job losses, and heated health care town hall debates that show we have lost the art of dialogue, debate, and healthy disagreement (some of these town hall meetings would cause Jerry Springer to raise an eyebrow) these heated debates puts reality TV to shame)...all of these challenges cause us to ask, "where is the spirit of God?" Now, let me ask another question. What happens when we are given an invitation to enter into a new world, a world that value equality, a world that truly wants every individual to have opportunities, and dignity, and safety, and quality health care from cradle to grave? Maybe that's where the spirit of God is. The spirit is in the invitation to love our neighbor as ourselves. The spirit is in the invitation to see something of God in every human-being. The spirit is in the invitation to share prosperity rather than to hoard it, to share hope instead of to deny it, to share love instead of spreading fear. Where is the spirit? It is in the new view, the renewed commitment of Sharing the light with the world!

You know, Jesus faced limitations. He faced fears and prejudices and a privileged class trying to keep the others in their place. He faced disease and despair. He faced fundamentalism within his

religion and totalitarianism in his government. But he saw beyond the limitations, and in his vision of what could be, the spirit was present.

Jesus faced the difficulties of his day, and spoke words of hope. And those who heard what Jesus had to say received into their spirits a new word and a new vision and a new hope for a new day. Those who received the new word that Jesus offered became empowered to see beyond their present realities because of the spirit that was within them. It was a spirit that renewed their thinking, changed their way of living, and ultimately changed the conversation from one of living with the mindset of being fixated on what is missing to one of being thankful for the possibilities that still exist! Jesus actually shared a message of hope, which is to say he shared the spirit of hope, which is the spirit of God!

I believe our gospel reading today provides us with an opportunity to have a new kind of conversation where we focus in on the thought of a spirit that gives life. A different kind of conversation is needed to communicate a new understanding of the potential that exists for us. John's Gospel shows us Jesus offering the spirit of hope which challenges the limitations we have previously experienced and imagined.

If we accept this spirit that Jesus spoke of that gives life, then the realities of our lives have been altered in a positive direction. In our quest for something new, something different, something holy, something wonderful, something to hold on to in our times of need, in our quest to find and break the status quo, we experience this new life that John's Jesus speaks of today. Jesus did not say that I am new life; rather it is the spirit that offers new life and new opportunities. In our search for hope, in our search for life, the life line has already been offered to us through the spirit that gives us new life, or a new lease on life or a second chance...that's the grace of God, or in the words of the gospel, "the spirit."

We have heard John's Jesus referred to the One that takes away the sins of the world; those words transform our world order into a new way of thinking and being. Jesus' positive outlook takes away our need to belittle ourselves. Jesus' positive outlook takes away our need to look for the worst or to fear the future. Jesus models the spirit of hope. He shares the spirit of hope. And we can embrace and internalize that spirit of hope today. It is the spirit of God, and with God all things are possible.

St. Paul said, "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3.17). The spirit of hope frees us to be our best selves. The spirit of hope frees us to believe in ourselves. The spirit of hope frees us to celebrate our gifts. The spirit of hope frees us to get up when we fall, to try again when we fail, to see past the problem to the possible solution. The spirit of hope is the spirit of freedom; it is the spirit of God.

A song from my childhood religious tradition says, "And you walk with me and you talk with me and you tell me I am your own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known." The spirit of God is everywhere and it is everlasting. It is the spirit of hope, the spirit of freedom, the spirit of life. It connects us to the best in life, and to the power of divine love. It reminds us we are children of God and it offers us joy that no situation can take away.

Our Proverbs reading reminds us that Wisdom has already built the house; the table is set for us. Let us put aside anything and everything that is hindering us from sharing in the presence of the Divine and let us enter that presence in peace as we take the Peace into ourselves because that is where the spirit of God is!

Amen.