### “I Pour Out My Spirit” Steve Finlan for The First Church, May 28, 2023

**Acts 2:1–18**

1When the day of Pentecost came, 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. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

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

14 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. 15Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. 16No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17 ‘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. 18Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.’”

**John 7:37–39**

37On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, 38and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” 39Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Welcome to Pentecost, the anniversary of the birthday of the church. Not the anniversary of when Jesus’ teaching began, or of when he rose from the dead, but of when the church, as such, was begun, when the Spirit of Truth was poured out.

We, today, have the same spirit that they received on the day of Pentecost. Why don’t we have the same numerous miraculous events? When something is new, it has a vividness and power that it doesn’t have when it’s familiar. We tend to take the Spirit for granted. It’s part of our minds and of our everyday experience, but it lacks the freshness and power of when it was new. We who are born after Pentecost do not know a “before” and “after.” It is hard for us to realize what an amazing gift it is. We have to really *practice* spiritual living to re-ignite that energy and get that feeling of newness.

Notice one thing that is expressed differently in the two passages. In Acts, Joel has God saying, “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (2:17), but in John, Jesus speaks of the Spirit flowing out of the believer’s heart (7:38). Acts is speaking about the initial outpouring; Jesus is speaking of what happens when the believer has already taken the Spirit into his heart. It then wells up and spills over like water rising up in a well. The Spirit can’t be contained. It wants to water everything all around. Have you ever felt that power welling up within you? Did you feel a desire to tell someone about Jesus? You can act on that; just make sure it is saturated with love—*his* love. That’s the only time that a testimony will really speak of his true nature. It is our own experiences with Jesus that will resonate with others.

Some of the best descriptions of the amazing spirit within us come from John. John tells us that Jesus is quoting Scripture when he says “Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water” (7:38), but scholars have had a notoriously difficult time trying to identify which Scripture he intended.

The two closest, I think, are from Isaiah; 12:3 says “With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation” and 58:11 says “you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.” Proverbs 18:4 also echoes a little: “The words of the mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a gushing stream.”

The Isaiah passages give a promise of a future watering, without any mention of a spirit. The proverb speaks more about what is true of a person at any time, that wisdom, if it exists, lies deep within, and can gush forth like a stream. Neither speaks of the future outpouring of a Spirit, as the Joel passage does. It’s possible that Jesus was referring to more than one Scripture, and that John, operating from memory, condensed them into one new saying. It’s interesting, what he came up with, even if it is not precisely accurate.

In fact, the passage in John is more vivid and revealing than any of those Old Testament passages considered by themselves. It places the source of the flowing in the believer’s heart. So the one who trusts in Jesus becomes a fount of spiritual blessings that well up like fresh water, ready to nurture everyone all around. It shows both the dimension of inwardness, in each heart, and of outward sociality, welling up to benefit others with living water. Then those who are ready to receive the spirit energy reflect that outwardly in ever-spreading ripples.

This fits with the image of pouring out that occurs in the Joel quote that Peter used so effectively. God pours out the spirit, and it lands on “all flesh” (Acts 2:17), male and female, young and old, slave and free. There are no class or gender distinctions. Anyone who receives this spirit will be able to prophesy.

If you have the Spirit you have God within. That’s what the word “enthusiasm” means. “En” means “in,” and “Thu” means “God.” I was thinking, “what can I use to illustrate enthusiasm?” It occurred to me that the song “Oh Happy Day,” as performed by the Edwin Hawkins singers, would be an example. Do you remember the repeated line “Oh happy day, when Jesus washed, when Jesus washed, oh when he washed, he washed my sins away.” It makes Jesus feel very close.

Another enthusiastic song comes from the musical *Godspell*; it’s the song “Day by Day.” It’s a sung prayer: “Day by day, day by day. Oh dear Lord, three things I pray. To see thee more clearly; love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day.” We are renewed daily with the Spirit.

And there is a story found in Acts that embodies enthusiasm. It is when Paul, Luke, and other evangelists went to Philippi. While they were preaching there, they were arrested and thrown into prison; even so, while in jail, they were praying and singing hymns. Then there was an earthquake, all the prison doors were opened, the chains loosened, and they were set free (16:25–26). The jailer was going to commit suicide when he thought the prisoners escaped, but they didn’t escape; they talked with him about Jesus and he desired to be saved. They baptized his whole family. The city magistrates released them (16:30–39).

Twenty centuries later, two Chinese women were imprisoned for holding unauthorized Christian gatherings. Xiaohui and Shang sang the Chinese hymn “Sing a Heavenly Song,” and before long, the other prisoners learned the tune and were singing along. They uplifted the spirits of everyone in that cell block. I was unable to find the end of that story, but I think at least Xiaohui got out of prison to tell her story, which led to this report. Spirit works in amazing ways.

We may be less fervent than this, but we can still feel the energy within and allow the spirit to move us inwardly. We can still feel a rising excitement when we are in the flow of it. We can be moved by ideas, truths, songs, and, even more deeply, by feelings and motivations to contribute to the spread of love. So go forth, sons and daughters, and testify to the love and truth that have touched your heart. Serve others where you can. Let the living waters flow within you, and then around you. You have this liquid blessing. It is yours always. You will begin to feel this reservoir of spiritual energy, and let it guide you through your lifetime, through your spiritual journey. Set aside time for yourself and allow the conversation to carry on.