

Will We Manifest the Spirit for the Common Good?

Friends (long-time and new), let us wonder together on this Pentecost Sunday: Will we manifest the Spirit for the common good? I invite us to be open to this question as it relates both to our individual lives and the life of our congregation. Let us pray:

Empowering God: your Holy Loving Spirit calls us to be radically present in each moment, with each breath we accept and release. Be with us this morning as we each wonder how your Spirit manifests through us. In every move we make, grant us serenity to accept the things that are not within our power to change, courage to change the things we can, and wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Fellow sojourners, what are your deepest, truest longings? What do you most wish to experience and witness in the world? We believe that God's Holy Loving Spirit can manifest itself through our longings for the common good. I invite you to close your eyes if you're comfortable doing so and to listen with your body, mind, and spirit as I name nine deep longings. Watch for one or more that sound true for you. I'll share them twice, so don't worry if you miss something the first time through. With eyes closed if you wish, for which of these does your soul (the core of you) long?

- For integrity, fairness and balance?
- For warmth and affection in relationships?
- To be valued and feel worthy?
- To be fully understood as your authentic self?
- To be competent and capable?
- To be safe and secure within community?
- To explore possibilities without limits?
- To challenge the status quo and uphold dignity?
- To be at peace internally and externally?

For which of these does your soul (the core of you) long?

- For integrity, fairness and balance?
- For warmth and affection in relationships?
- To be valued and feel worthy?
- To be fully understood as your authentic self?
- To be competent and capable?
- To be safe and secure within community?
- To explore possibilities without limits?
- To challenge the status quo and uphold dignity?
- To be at peace internally and externally?

Opening your eyes if you wish; If you did not hear your own deepest, truest longing within these examples from the self-understanding tool called the Enneagram, then I invite you to continue wondering, welcoming words that help you articulate your own core longing. I have come to believe that our deep longings significantly influence how and what we co-create during our lifetimes in the Earth community.

American theologian and novelist Frederick Buechner once wrote these words about vocation (words now cherished by many): **“The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet.”**

Buechner suggests that our most authentic call from God is found at the nexus between our deep gladness (our passion, strength, giftedness) and the world’s deep hunger (the ways in which God cries out to us through others). I believe that longing and gladness are intertwined at the core of each of our human souls.

Now, what does any of this have to do with Pentecost? Well, last Sunday we shared in the mystical story of Jesus’ ascension. Just before he disappeared into the clouds and out of their sight, their rabbi commissioned his closest disciples with these words:

“You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; then you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). So it was, based in Jesus’ confidence that they could continue his ministry beyond the scope of his lifetime, that the disciples were gathered in Jerusalem, awaiting a sign of the presence of God’s Holy Loving Spirit. As the story unfolds, they would not be disappointed.

We heard Mary Maren read these opening lines of the Pentecost story: *“When the day of Pentecost arrived, they all met in one room. Suddenly they heard what sounded like a violent, rushing wind from heaven; the noise filled the entire house in which they were sitting.”* (Acts 2:2)

As I considered in recent days how we would be sharing in this reading in this physical space, I was delighted to think about the Holy Spirit’s wonderfully, tangible presence (week in and week out) here at People’s Park – sometimes in breeze and always in the graceful movements and gentle sounds of plant life and animal life.

I find a lot of truth in this maxim: we know what we know when we know it. In that moment, the people knew God’s Holy Loving Spirit was rushing into their midst. Some first century followers of Jesus were fellow Jews and others had gravitated toward him from other religious backgrounds.

All who had heard core stories of the Jewish faith knew about *ruach* – a Hebrew word meaning wind, breath, divine energy and presence. God’s holy loving *ruach* has been present since the beginning and is always present in creation. God’s energetic, breathing, windy *ruach* was present as the enslaved people of Israel sought and achieved liberation from the Egyptian pharaoh.

The Greek word used for wind in this passage is *pnoe*. This is one of only two instances of the word *pnoe* (wind) in the New Testament scriptures.

However, it is linguistically and spiritually related to the word *pneuma*, which is found very frequently in the New Testament and translates into English as Spirit or Holy Spirit. More broadly in the Greek language, *pneuma* means the vital spirit, soul, or creative force of a person.

I love how scripture describes the crowd as “amazed,” “astonished,” and “disturbed” as they witnessed the apostles speaking with new boldness and in many languages. We can also embody Jesus’ powerful messages of grace, forgiveness and new life in ways that amaze, astonish and disturb people.

Let’s turn to the reading from 1 Corinthians for words of encouragement for our lives of faith. We need encouragement in order to be vulnerable enough to welcome the Holy Love Spirit – windy *ruach* and creative *pneuma* – to manifest itself through our truest longings and deepest gladnesses.

We heard Mary Maren read these words of encouragement, written first to a fledgling church in Corinth and empowering to many across the ages: *“There is a variety of gifts, but always the same Spirit. There is a variety of ministries, but we serve the same One. There is a variety of outcomes, but the same God is working in all of them. To each person is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ...it is one and the same Spirit who produces all these gifts and distributes them as she wills. (1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 11).* The Love of God will manifest through you in unique ways across your lifetime – in ways that are different from each other beautiful way *ruach* or *pneuma* will work through me and each of our neighbors.

We heard these words at the end of the reading from First Corinthians: *“The body is one, even though it has many parts; all the parts – many though they are – comprise a single body. And so it is with Christ.*

It was by one Spirit that all of us, whether we were Jews or Greeks, [en]slaved or citizen, were baptized into one body. All of us have been given to drink of the one Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13)

Did you hear that? “*All of us have been given to drink from the one Spirit.*” And we will manifest the Spirit in a multitude of different ways. And we can collaborate as a church to share an amazing, astonishing, disturbing message of love (love that includes all) for the common good.

I close with a favorite word of encouragement from African American theological scholar and educator Howard Thurman once wrote, “*Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do that, because what the world needs is more people who have come alive.*”

So may Love grant us the humility and self-compassion to perceive *ruach* and *pneuma* at work and manifesting itself through our own lives.

And may Love grant us the compassion (that is, an active desire to better know and care for another) to perceive *ruach* and *pneuma* at work and manifesting itself through the lives of each of our neighbors.

Love is counting on us. Amen.

Rev. Clare Gromoll
People’s Congregational Church (Bayport, MN)
May 28, 2023 (Pentecost Sunday)
Acts 2:1-18, 1 Corinthians 12:4-13