

I. Intro

A. All right, here we go, folks! The Charismatic Stream ...

1. I bet we have a lot of charismatic people right now who've been waiting for us to loosen up and let the Spirit flow freely at Waterford

a) You know ... fewer inhibitions on what people say, on what language they speak in, how they move their bodies, how loud the music is, what style of praying they use ...

b) As long as the Holy Spirit is prompting it, it's all good, right?

c) How many of you have been eagerly waiting for this kind of Holy Spirit outbreak to happen at Waterford? *(If any raise hands, invite them to preach this sermon!)*

2. Actually, I anticipated today's featured spiritual stream might be a bit more of a challenge than the Holiness stream that Cindy preached on last week

a) If you're like many North American Mennonite churches filled with people from predominantly German ethnic backgrounds, inviting people into Charismatic spirituality might actually make them head for the doors!

b) For that reason, I prefer the subtitle that Richard Foster uses to describe this spiritual stream: also called The Spirit-Empowered Life

c) Some of you who lived through the 1960s and 70s remember what was called the Charismatic Movement, which spread across American churches and certainly influenced Mennonites ...

It brought with it much more informality in worship, more freedom of emotion and expression, including some biblical practices like speaking in tongues, or healing in Jesus' name

Some of these practices baffled other Mennonites ... or just plain made them uncomfortable, to a point that actually led to splits in some Mennonite churches

B. Let me try to be clear:

1. The Spirit-empowered spiritual stream includes the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements and their heirs ... it includes faith healers and people who speak in tongues BUT

2. It is not one and the same as those traditions, nor is it limited to those movements and their more ecstatic practices

3. Furthermore, here's a word of advice for those of us who react negatively to that word "charismatic" and who definitely do NOT identify ourselves as such:

a) Pay attention to this spiritual stream ... Listen to this stream, even if you don't feel strongly drawn to it

Text: John 14:15-17; 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15

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- b) As Cindy said last week, No single one of these spiritual streams is inherently better than others, and none of them is "wrong"
- c) For Christ's church in this world to be healthy and grow, all 6 of these streams are essential.
- d) If we dismiss or ignore any of these streams, our own faith and witness will be truncated ... incomplete & unbalanced

C. My fellow Waterford Mennonites:

- 1. We may never describe ourselves to others as a "charismatic" church, but we need the charismatic spiritual types among us.
- 2. Any church that is totally lacking in this stream of spirituality is, in fact, spiritually dead!

II. So what do we mean by the Charismatic Stream?

A. Last week Cindy introduced us to the Holiness Stream, which Mennonites often identify with

- 1. Richard Foster says that, "While the Holiness Tradition centers upon the power *to be*, the Charismatic Tradition centers upon the power *to do*." (Foster, p. 99)
- 2. We shouldn't make too much of that distinction, because these 2 traditions are most healthy when they do NOT function independently of each other.

B. Basic definition

- 1. ... focuses on the empowering gifts of the Spirit and the nurturing fruit of the Spirit
 - a) God did not create us to live life all on our own power. There is an otherworldly reality, which is life in & thru the Spirit of God
 - b) For that we were created, and the Charismatic Stream pays special attention to this other reality
- 2. Within this spiritual stream, God is not some distant deity, some divine concept or set of moral rules to follow.
 - a) Rather this stream ... addresses the deep yearning for the immediacy of God's presence among God's people.
 - b) Spirit-empowered people don't want to just know about God, or even to know God in some formalized way ...
 - c) they seek a deep intimacy with God who is felt and experienced close at hand and within

The Charismatic Stream
... a life immersed in, empowered by,
and under the direction of the Spirit
of God

... addresses the deep yearning for
the immediacy of God's presence
among God's people.

Richard Foster, Streams of Living Water, pp. 132, 99

C. One of the hallmarks of this tradition is its emphasis on the

charisms, or gifts of the Holy Spirit

1. A year ago last fall we spent several Sundays focusing on recognizing and using our God-given spiritual gifts, as part of our Fanning the Flames series.

- a) Every follower of Jesus is endowed by the Spirit with one or more of these special gifts
- b) We won't repeat that material, which is especially found in 1 Corinthians 12 to 14, and in Ephesians 4.

2. A good way to summarize what's there is to identify 3 main types or functions of the gifts of the Spirit:

- a) Gifts of leadership (e.g. apostleship, evangelism, preaching)
- b) Gifts of ecstatic empowerment (tongues, discernment of spirits, prophecy)
- c) Community-building gifts (wisdom, faith, helping)

3. Again, if one or 2 of these make us uncomfortable, we do not have the luxury of just denying or deleting them, unless we're prepared to start deleting every part of the Bible that we don't like

- a) For example, it was helpful for me to be reminded that the ecstatic gifts are most often given to show that God is present where we assume that God is not
- b) The original Pentecost in Jerusalem showed God to be powerfully with some disciples who were seen as uneducated commoners or outlaws
- c) Similarly in 1906 on Azusa Street in Los Angeles, through the dynamic ministries of a black man named William Seymour, God unleashed an amazing display of interracial spiritual revival and speaking in tongues, which launched the worldwide Pentecostal movement ...

60 years before the height of the American civil rights movement, Seymour channeled the ecstatic gifts of the Spirit to break down racial and gender barriers that bound the church of Jesus Christ

In the Azusa Street mission, God was active across color lines in ways that most white American churchmen could never allow

(Foster, pp. 112-125)

III. Strengths & perils of this stream

A. Strengths of the Spirit-empowered life

1. Corrects our impulse to domesticate God

- a) We have a constant tendency to manage & control the Spirit's work ... we want a nice, tidy God
- b) But Jesus reminded us that the Spirit blows where it wills, and this

stream reminds us that God cannot be tamed

2. Frees the church from an anemic, tradition-bound religion

- a) It's so easy for us to be content merely with religious talk & "church as usual" ... with a faith that sounds nice but is powerless to make anything happen
- b) Paul in 1 Cor. 4:20 that, "the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power."

3. Challenges us to spiritual growth through using our spiritual gifts

- a) There's more to this stream than simply spiritual power unleashed in the world ... that power must produce growth in our lives as Christians
- b) This is why the Charismatic stream also emphasizes the nurturing fruit of the Spirit ... so that the outcome of the gifts of the Spirit in us looks like love, joy, peace, patience and those other holy habits named in Galatians 5

4. Provides Spirit empowerment for witness and service (Foster, pp. 129-130)

- a) Whatever good things the Spirit does in and through us are not meant to puff up our egos or just to personally bless us
- b) When the Spirit produces signs and wonders, miraculous healings or amazing reconciliations, it is precisely a witness to nonbelievers and an encouraging guide for the body of Christ

B. Potential perils of Spirit-empowered life

1. Misplaced focus on the gift rather than the Giver

- a) Far too often Xians have cared more about spectacular things like prophecy & tongues & healing than they have about God who gives those gifts for the sake of faith formation and stronger fellowship
- b) Sometimes there is such a fascination with signs and miracles that people expect ordinary Xian faith MUST be spectacular or miraculous

2. Rejecting the rational & intellectual side of faith

- a) Although this spiritual stream rightly focuses on the emotional side of our faith, it must never reject reason or the mind
- b) We love God with both the mind and the heart.

3. Separating gifts of the Spirit from the fruit of the Spirit

- a) This was the problem Paul was correcting at the church in Corinth, because they paid attention to the former at the expense of the latter
- b) The power of the gifts of the Spirit is meant to be exercised along with the maturing that the fruit of the Spirit brings

4. Too much attention to highly speculative scenarios of the end times (Foster, pp. 130-131)

Text: John 14:15-17; 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15

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- a) Although not all charismatically oriented Xians fall prey to this, it is an especially common problem for this stream
- b) This danger takes people into direct contradiction of Jesus' words that no one except the Father knows the times and places of the last days

IV. That's an overview of the Charismatic Stream of spirituality ... its characteristics, strengths & perils

A. I've alluded already to some Scripture passages that are important for this tradition ...

- 1. namely the sections that name spiritual gifts and also the list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5
- 2. But this morning we also prayerfully and musically heard some sections from the Gospel of John, in the words of Jesus himself

B. What we heard highlighted various ways that Jesus described the Holy Spirit who would be coming to His disciples, soon after Jesus had left them

- 1. The sections we heard are called the *Paraclete* Sayings of Jesus
 - a) Not parakeet, like a pet bird ...
 - b) *Paraclete* is the Greek name given in the Gospel of John for God's Spirit, who would follow after Jesus
 - c) This name *Paraclete* is most often translated as The Advocate, but it could also mean The Helper
- 2. What do we know about this Advocate who is later also called The Holy Spirit? If we are to live the Spirit-empowered life, then we should be familiar with what that Spirit does

C. According to the passages we just heard, this is what God's Spirit has been doing in the world, since the time Jesus was taken back up into heaven: (from L Hartshorn "Love is a verb" Spiritual Practices Resource, p. 43)

- 1. Author of truth, who guides Jesus' disciples into truth
- 2. God's presence now, both with us and within us
- 3. Teaches disciples, reminding them what Jesus said
- 4. Witnesses for Jesus, along with disciples themselves
- 5. Convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgment
- 6. Declares what God says and things that are to come.

V. So what has this Spirit-empowered life looked like in history and how can we strengthen our own practice of it?

A. Here's a very short list of some of the most noteworthy

"charismatic" individuals in the Bible and history

1. Apostle Paul
2. St. Francis of Assisi
3. George Fox (founder of the Quakers)
4. William Seymour (1906 Azusa Street revival)
5. Aimee Semple McPherson (founder of Foursquare Gospel churches)
6. John Wimber (founder of Vineyard movement)

B. Last week Cindy highlighted how much the early Anabaptists seemed to fit within the Holiness spiritual stream, with their emphasis on virtue, discipleship & the Sermon on the Mount

1. But if we think the Charismatic Tradition is not very Anabaptist, we better think again.
 - a) We Germanic Mennonites with our structured, thoughtful and subdued worship services, are no longer typical of the Anabaptist worldwide fellowship of churches
 - b) You may remember on Pentecost Sunday I described for you the loud & lively worship some of us from Waterford experienced in Honduran Mennonite churches when we visited in April
 - c) In reality, around the world the Pentecostal movement has had significant influence among Mennonite and Anabaptist churches, especially in Latin America and Africa
 2. But that's not just true in the 20th & 21st Centuries:
 - a) As missionary and professor John Driver has described it, from the very beginning the Anabaptist movement was inspired by a deep understanding of the role of the Spirit in the life of the church.
 - b) A charismatic spirituality found expression in several ways among the early Anabaptists:
 - 1st: some spoke often not of one baptism but of three: baptism of the Spirit, of water, and of blood
 - 2nd: In their reading of the Bible, the early Anabaptists were much less literal, and they relied more heavily on the Spirit for biblical interpretation, as channeled through ordinary believers, not just the ordained priests.
 - 3rd, very ironically, one of the perils of this stream is a heavy emphasis on highly speculative end times scenarios ... [John Driver, Life Together in the Spirit, ©2015 Mennonite World Conference, Plough Publishing House, pp. 31-34]
- yet because of the chaotic times in which they lived in the 16th Century, some Anabaptists gave in to this same temptation

Text: John 14:15-17; 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:7-15

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C. Whether 490 years ago in Europe, or today in the United States & around the world, the Charismatic Stream is a spiritual tradition just as significant as the other 5

1. Here are a few ways that you might pay attention to it and put it into practice today:
2. Make an acquaintance and learn to know someone who strongly connects with this tradition
 - a) When you have a need, invite such a friend to lay hands on you and pray for you for more life and joy of spirit
 - b) Attend a worship service with that friend in a church known for this stream ... then talk about it and ask questions of your friend
3. Try engaging in all 4 of the spiritual practices in Leo Hartshorn's "Love is a Verb" resource under the Charismatic Tradition section
4. Take one of the lessons from Pastor Cindy and our recent worship series from Matthew 14, and apply it to life in the Spirit:
 - a) If the Spirit leads you to get out of your boat, then boldly step out!
 - b) If your own inner spirit is teachable, don't be afraid of being misled.

VI. Conclusion

A. Finally, whether or not you & I "feel" very charismatic, we all need to claim this Spirit-empowerment because the gifts of the Spirit and fruit of the Spirit are for all believers, not just for a select few.

1. I like one very memorable line in Foster's book that serves to remind me that I dare not try to deny or diminish this particular spiritual stream:
2. Frankly, there are no "noncharismatic Christians." (Foster, p. 125)

B. By this he means that the Christian life is by definition a life in and through the Spirit ... may that truly describe all of us!