

I. Intro.: Like many of you, I like to make sense of what's going on in my life ...

A. I want to feel like I know what I'm doing and why things are happening the way they are

1. I desire a stable framework for the world to fit in
2. And if I don't have any idea where life is taking me, I get very anxious ...
 - a) then I start desperately looking for clues that will somehow make sense to me, to explain what looks unexplainable
 - b) My personality highly values structure & order ... I prefer not flying by the seat of my pants

B. 22 years ago I faced one of those chaotic situations that really stretched my sense of stability and upset my ordered world

1. I beg apologies from those who have heard this story before, but it's foundational to who & where I am today
2. At age 31, with wife & 2 small kids, I was getting ready for a controlled career change:
 - a) I was moving from being a nursing home social worker in a very small town, to being a grad school student in a larger university town, studying for a degree in library science
 - b) I had given notice at my job ... we had renters lined up for our house
 - c) Arrangements for an apartment near the university were made for us ... it was all set up – until the bottom fell out!
3. I learned that I was not eligible for the educational loans and assistance that I thought I would be getting
 - a) Janette & I had numerous agonized evenings wondering, "How could this be? Why was this happening to us?"
 - b) To make matters worse, my pastor suggested to me that I should be considering going to seminary and that maybe all these unfortunate events were happening for a reason ...
 - c) Well, that just confused me more
4. In the following week at my work in the nursing home, strange things started happening to me:
 - a) As I walked down the halls, unrelated outside thoughts of "seminary" popped in to my head, totally out of the blue.

Has something like that ever happened to you? (well, maybe not the word "seminary")

My usual response in such situations is to note the thought with something like, "That's weird ... where did THAT come from?"

Then I consciously dismiss it and return to my activities

b) But that week that thought of seminary had an inexplicable appeal ... it could not be dismissed ... it wouldn't go away

c) This had never happened to me before, but it happened several days in a row in the middle of that nursing home

C. I desperately tried to make sense of what was happening to me, as my plans seemed to unravel before my eyes

1. I thought maybe I was going crazy
2. More than once, Janette & I were wondering, "Why, God?"
3. But more than anything else, faced with disruptive and unexplainable events, we were really asking the same question that the onlookers in Acts 2 were asking: "What does this mean?" *(if you need to hear rest of story, come ask me later ...)*

II. Today we turn our focus away from specifically celebrating the risen Lord Jesus in the Easter season.

A. After the ascension of Jesus, we turn now to the way that God provided for Jesus to continue living on in us – the Holy Spirit!

1. God has shown a great creative imagination in HOW God has moved and worked in the world ...
2. If I were to ask you to quick list a few examples of how or where God's Spirit has been at work in the world, *would you be able to name some?*
3. Pentecost is the Sunday when we celebrate the power of God at work throughout the world, both visibly and invisibly
 - a) The Bible shows us that the Spirit (breath) of God has been active in the world in many different ways, from before, during and after the time of Jesus on this earth.
 - b) As Aaron noted with the kids, Pentecost marks the birthday of the church. This morning you already heard 3 Lectionary Scriptures for Pentecost Sunday ...

B. Let's hear briefly from each of these texts to give us glimpses of how God's Spirit is manifest

1. 1st in Ps.104, the Psalmist tells us how manifold God's works are:

- a) God created the earth and all the creatures ... if you look back to Genesis 1, you read about the breath/Spirit of God being present from the very beginning, brooding and hovering
- b) But God didn't just create the creatures a long time ago ... the breath of God continues to sustain them, or to leave them at the time that they die
- c) Remembering that the same Hebrew word means both breath and Spirit, listen again to God's activity as described in vv. 29-30

2. Another, and very traditional, Scripture passage here on Pentecost Sunday is the lively story we heard from Acts chapter 2

- a) This is when the church first truly came alive thru the gift of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit among them, independent of the physical presence of Jesus
- b) For those original disciples of Jesus, gathered in Jerusalem waiting for something to happen as Jesus had instructed them, the evidence of God's Spirit among them was very clear and obvious, both on that momentous day, but also ever after that
- c) The clearest manifestations of the Spirit from Acts 2 were the gift of boldness in sharing the Gospel, and the gift of the sudden ability to praise God in foreign languages

3. The 3rd manifestation of God's Spirit which we saw from Scripture this morning is the varied spiritual gifts first described for the believers in Corinth

- a) In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul instructs this fledgling church on how to be a strong community in Christ by maintaining unity even while they make full use of the various gifts God has given
- b) He especially notes that each member has certain manifestations of God's Spirit, given for the common good & not for individual glory
- c) The many gifts of the Spirit identified in I Cor. 12 and other places in the New Testament ... these were perhaps the most widespread and visible evidence of the Holy Spirit's activity after the ascension of Jesus

III. "What does this mean?" ... That was the question asked in Acts 2:12 by an international Jewish crowd,

A. This crowd had witnessed amazing events of wind & flames ... they heard sudden new language abilities coming from some uneducated Galilean country folks

- 1. They were presented w/ something very new & were trying to make sense of it

- a) They didn't understand this new reality of a risen J.C. & the God of Abraham now being present thru an active divine Spirit
- b) The essence and power of Yahweh, seen & heard in Jesus, was active among them beyond Jesus, but they didn't "get it" yet

2. They wondered @ the implications for their own future direction, so they asked "What does this mean?"

B. Although our experiences @ Waterford seem tame in comparison, the story is not unrelated to our situation as a congregation:

- 1. We've heard this Pentecost story, most of us, all our lives. As Xians, we have 2K years' benefit of living w/ the Holy Spirit, at least as a concept ...
- 2. but when we the Waterford congregation try to take stock of Holy Spirit's activity among us & translate that into a future direction, we too have to ask, "*What does this mean ... for us?*"

C. Actually, I think there are 2 time frames in which we can apply that question ... 2 temporal lenses for Waterford to look at the activity of the Holy Spirit when we ask "What does this mean for us?"

IV. 1st, we can think about it in the present:

A. We can ask, "What does the Holy Spirit's activity mean for us today? Is the Spirit of God that was revealed by the Scriptures still active among us today? ... If so, how?"

B. Well, just as in Ps. 104, I think God's spirit that hovered over creation is still evident in the beauty of creation

- 1. Over the years I've talked to so many Christians, including some of you here, who've said that God's Spirit never feels closer to them than when they are out enjoying the beauty that God created
- 2. For some God's Spirit is most obvious when they visit the mountains, or when canoeing, or biking in the country
- 3. For some, this connection with God's Spirit thru nature is exactly why church camps like Amigo Centre are holy places
- 4. At Waterford we like to say we have a 2nd sanctuary out there on the wetlands trails, and some of you will be going out there to worship as well today in a nurture hour affinity group

C. Today we also heard that wild 1st Pentecost story from Acts chap. 2 ... How's that one playing out here at Waterford?

1. Have you seen very many people speaking in tongues here lately, boldly telling everyone about Jesus, or doing spectacular unexplainable things? ... No, me neither
2. The fact is, sometimes we Protestants from Germanic cultural backgrounds don't exactly know what to do with Pentecost
 - a) We like church to be planned, controlled, quiet & cerebral, without whooping, hollering, shaking dancing and emotional displays
 - b) Truth be told, the wild untamed Spirit of God makes us nervous, as do so-called Pentecostal Christians & those from more "expressive" cultures
3. It's a true admission to say that as a whole we are not a very "Charismatic" congregation.
4. Let us honestly name that, even while we respect other Christians from that tradition, but let us also remain open to God working in sometimes spontaneous and spectacular ways.

D. So ... what about that 3rd Scripture ... 1 Cor. 12 and the many spiritual gifts in Corinth? Is the Spirit active like that here?

1. You'd better believe it! And you need not look farther than last Sunday and this Sunday to see it.
2. First of all, let me quickly name that just having quality worship every Sunday by itself is testimony to the Spirit at work:
 - a) God is the One who gifted all these people to contribute skills like planning, Scripture reading, leading music, playing instruments, preaching, praying, running AV booth, ushering, creating visuals, leading children's time, caring for children in the nursery, greeting guests, making coffee, using drama ...
 - b) Thank you, Holy Spirit, for gifting your people week in & week out!
3. But last Sunday & this Sunday are special examples of God's Spirit on display in the gifts of the people
 - a) Wasn't the music and energy just fantastic last Sunday from our high school musicians and other participants on the Seniors Recognition Sunday?
 - b) It was especially uplifting to hear Pastor Katie name the God-given strengths and gifts of all the graduates
 - c) Now today, besides the gifts being used in the sanctuary worship time, we're shaking things up a bit from our usual Sunday School classes: we're drawing on special gifts being offered in cooking, hands-on arts, walking or biking in God's creation, and other activities.

4. So there are several good answers for the question, "What does this mean, for us today?" But there is another timeframe to consider, because the present keeps shifting so quickly into the past ...

V. Let's ask the Q re. Holy Spirit activity in reference to the future: "What does this mean for us down the road?"

A. Ideally, this would be a great time for the pastoral team leader to use that Q to lay out a new congregational direction statement for our future

1. Our most recent directional statement was intended for a 5-year period that finished in summer of 2016
2. Congregational leaders were about to put energy into a new directional statement in 2016 when we had a pastoral transition, with Lyle leaving & Katie coming in and getting adjusted
 - a) I certainly affirm God's work in where we have arrived today in our Family Life Ministries ... but we're only now again turning attention toward the directions that God may be calling us in the next 3 to 5 years
 - b) In the past year we simply extended our last directional statement to continue to be the overall vision of the congregation until we could pray and develop a new one.
3. So I don't quite have clear answers to suggest on Pentecost Sunday for the Q, "What does this mean for Waterford in the future?"
4. Yet even so, I have seen glimpses of some new & inspiring things which I wonder if the Holy Spirit might be pointing us toward ...

B. What new & inspiring things might God be bringing us here at Waterford in the coming years?

1. Well the Elkhart County HOPE Network keeps developing its capacity as a grassroots mechanism for local people to provide tangible support to vulnerable immigrants among us,
 - a) I have been hearing the Scriptural call to welcome the stranger and immigrant in a time when immigrants are especially afraid of being targeted and deported, so we recently convened an initial subgroup called Waterford's HOPE Team, accountable to the Mission & Service MT
 - b) This group will help discern possible actions of immigrants
2. Perhaps related to this HOPE Team, God's Spirit may also call and challenge us in significant ways in worship this fall:
 - a) One of the major themes throughout the Bible is hospitality, so for 7 or 8 Sundays this fall our worship series will be on biblical hospitality

b) I say "biblical hospitality" because our common cultural definitions of what we mean by "hospitality" usually fall way short of what God means by hospitality in the Bible

3. As pastors we affirm the positive impact that Stephen Ministers have for pastoral care with numerous persons in the congregation

a) The Holy Spirit (sometimes called the Comforter) has often used Stephen Ministers as agents of divine comfort

b) Another intensive training for new Stephen Ministers is being planned for this fall. I trust this will be blessed and used by the Holy Spirit

4. Finally, few observation skills are needed to see how a culture of polarization, division and "us vs. them" is infecting our society.

a) Sadly the church is not immune from this infection, even though if any place in our world ought to be able to model civility, reconciliation and transcending divisions, it should be the church of Jesus Christ!

b) Pastors and Ministry Leadership Council are making plans for our congregation to begin to learn skills and gain practice in what we call "Conversations that Matter":

These are carefully designed conversations to get people talking and listening respectfully with others on topics of disagreement

Sometimes called "Difficult Discussions" we hope that Conversations that Matter will give us enough confidence in talking about difficult matters, that it becomes more normal and less scary to address such things within our faith community

c) I believe this is a Holy Spirit thing because churches that are equipped to deal constructively and respectfully with conflict and disagreement tend to be healthier than churches that always avoid those difficult discussions

VI. Conclusion

A. Friends, on Pentecost we celebrate the coming of the creative Spirit of Jesus in order to help us carry on the work of Jesus

B. May the Spirit of truth grant you wisdom as you continue asking that ancient Pentecost question, "What does this mean?"

1. May the Holy Comforter soothe your heart in troubled times and wrap the arms of divine love around you tenderly

2. And may the Holy Advocate nudge you out of your settledness into the uncomfortable but exhilarating unsettledness of life according to the Spirit. Amen.