

Rivers of Living Water
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1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

³No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; ⁵and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; ⁶and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

⁷To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

¹² For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body - Jews or Greeks, slaves or free - and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

John 7:37-39

³⁷ On 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.

We hear so many different descriptions of the Spirit, especially today on Pentecost. Tongues of flame, mighty wind, breath, dove, and rivers of living water to start. Living water might be to you one of the less familiar descriptions of the Spirit but it is a wonderfully tangible way of speaking of the Spirit. Now, first, I promise this was in no way orchestrated. I realized as I was preparing for worship this week that the air conditioning being on the fritz last week and cold water being offered to ease the discomfort of the heat gives a number of you a point of reference for the gift which water can be. However, you need not have been in worship last week, though, to know how life-giving water can be. Have you worked outside or gone for a long walk or taken a medicine which causes your mouth to be dry? **You** know what it is like to appreciate water.

Jesus says, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and 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.'" As our reading continues, it points out that the flowing rivers of living water refer to the Spirit. Does the language seem a bit odd to you? Why rivers? Well, what else has Jesus said about water? Earlier in John we can read Jesus tell the woman at the well, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I give will become in them a

spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”¹ In a dry and dusty land, where going to the well daily for water was a fact of life, and finding a well dried-up was not uncommon, people understood the value of an eternal spring. And, rather than a cup of water or a bucket of water, what flows from our hearts are **rivers** of living water. Not only does Jesus give but Jesus gives extravagantly and abundantly. This abundance is the Spirit.

It is no secret that there are many who say the church is dying. At best, the Spirit is flowing from each of our hearts like a trickle, they would say. I am not of this belief. As I mentioned in my note in the newsletter, it seems the Holy Spirit didn't get the memo that we think the church is dying. I have a privileged seat from which to view this. As I sat in session just this past week, we came up with three ways we want to try to reach out to the community as the church: a postcard to people who have moved nearby, a hymn sing, complete with lemonade and cookies, to celebrate the dedication of our new hymnals, and a concert to benefit the Food Pantry, and specifically to help them stock the items for babies. I watched the Spirit flowing. And being part of the presbytery's Committee on Preparation for Ministry, or CPM, I have the privilege of talking with people who are sensing God's call upon them to the ordered ministry of Teaching Elder, pastor. In the last two weeks, I have met with **three** people responding to this call. Three. To give you perspective, the presbytery currently has seven under its care. The Holy Spirit has not gotten our memo.

If new ways of outreach aren't enough to convince you the Spirit is moving here, in this very church, there's more. Life-giving water is flowing through this very sanctuary, through our dining room, through our doors. When someone is responding to a call to ministry, the first step is to ask your session to endorse you to begin the process. Of those three people I spoke to, one of them was going before her session to endorse her to begin the inquiry phase with the presbytery's CPM. Would you believe the Spirit is moving even here if I tell you that our own Katie Ebel came this week before our own session, who unanimously agreed to endorse her to pursue the call to ministry she is sensing? The Spirit moves among these very pews, even today! And the Spirit is moving in the wonderful, thoughtful, meaningful discussion we have in Wednesday Bible study. In the care we show one another during our time of fellowship. In the youth who are going on a mission trip to serve others. In our worship! I imagine you can name your own ways in which the Spirit is moving, in which rivers of life-giving water are felt flowing.

Part of my volunteer work on the presbytery's CPM includes orienting sessions to what it means to endorse someone and how to go about the process of deciding whether or not to endorse someone. In these orientation meetings, we talk about the fact that there are many gifts, many calls. We each have a

¹ John 4:13-14.

call from God: for some it is a call to the ordered ministry of Teaching Elder, for some a call to Christian Education, for some a call to be a disciple of Christ while working full time in the field of accounting. In these orientation sessions we draw from our reading from 1 Corinthians 12 to support the varied calls. “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. **To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.**” The call to be a disciple of Christ in accounting or mothering or nursing is equal to the call to ordered ministry, for we are all answering a call for the nurture of the common good.

“To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of the spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.” This list is not, nor was it intended to be, a complete list of the gifts of the Spirit but, instead, a suggestion of the wide variety of gifts of the Spirit. Do you have the gift of making people laugh? Are you a witness to God in your life? Do you have a green thumb? All of these are gifts of the Spirit; all are for the common good. We could just as legitimately read, “All these, *and more*, are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.”

On this Pentecost the stories we tell of the Spirit are not legend, a relic of the past. Every moment, still, the Spirit is activating gifts within people and, through our individual lives, new gifts are ever activated by this same Spirit. What can you do now that you couldn't ten years ago? What interests you now that never interested you before? “All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.” Friends, take heart. No matter what we may think, no matter what we may believe, no matter what doubts we have, the water which Jesus offers through the Spirit is eternal. If we have faith in Christ then we must have faith in Christ's body as the church, not the church as **we** define it but Christ's body as defined and led by the Spirit. We cannot tell the Spirit where the church will go for the Spirit is already moving ahead, already leading the church. Just as we have new interests and skills and gifts as time moves on, so, too, does the church. Our work is not to predict what they will be but to be open to them when the Spirit activates them. This is the good news of Pentecost – being open to the gifts which the Spirit activates, listening as our calls evolve. So may it be for you and for me!

Let us pray: Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on us that we might be part of what you have planned for your church, your body. Amen.