

## Pastor Roy's sermon from May 19, 2013 (Pentecost)

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Creator and the Lord Jesus Christ. 5/19/13

Today is Pentecost. For Christians, today is a festival celebrating the Spirit at work today in the church and in the world.

Who is the Holy Spirit and how does she help us? (I say “she” because we should all know that God is not male or female and it’s clearly not helpful to lift up male as closer to God than female. I believe the references to God as “he” in the Bible reflect the culture and social practices of the writers rather than the content of the inspired message. So, as I’ve said before, I like to balance out references to God by referring to the Spirit as she, since God is so often referred to as “he.”)

Most simply, the Spirit is God at work in us and the world. We could visualize the Spirit a bit of a divine superhero. But instead of a cape and tights, the Spirit has wings and comes with fire. Wings? Fire? What did this mean to the writers of Scripture and its first readers?

Surely the Spirit needs no wings to move, nor does she burn up her foes. Could the wings be freedom? Fire is all consuming and transforms what it touches but it also creates new possibilities—preparing new futures—but not necessarily in pleasant, controlled ways. This fire opens the way. Sometimes we get burned.

Yet in our tradition, we also think of the Spirit in terms of wind and breath. Wind blows over everything. The wind moves the weather. Breath is much more intimate. We need to breathe. Breath is life giving. We can only hear the breathing of others if it is quiet. The Spirit is the wind and the breath of God. The Spirit blows across the land on wings of fire, touching communities and nations who seek, in the ways they are able, to follow the ways of mercy and compassion. The Spirit is comfort and hope to individuals and groups who seek God—to be the hands and feet of God.

In the church, the Spirit reminds us of the ways of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Spirit stirs us to be faithful to Christ—to the ways and peace of Christ.

When you think about the Spirit, think of wings and fire. Think about wind and breath. Let these signs work on you throughout this week.

This Spirit moving among us and around us, within us. The Spirit is with us, but we must remember that the Spirit is not bound by us. The Spirit does gladly work with us, but will not hesitate to move in new directions with or without our agreement. We like to agree with the ways of the Spirit, but often we brace ourselves against the Spirit because we fear the ways of wings, fire, wind, and breath.

We don't enjoy change—but change is always coming to the church. Change is especially coming to the church in the United States today. The people with whom the Spirit has to work have changed their habits and ways, expectations and assumptions, so likewise the Spirit is blowing, breathing, and burning in ways that the people will understand and embrace—as they are able. The Spirit always goes to the people—does not wait for the people to come to her. After all, the Spirit came and continues to come to us, faithfully, patiently, with mercy and compassion.

The Spirit will continue with us even as she gifts us. Even as the Spirit comes to each of us in unique ways, so the Spirit gifts us in ways uniquely suited to us.

Thanks be to God that we do not have to do what we cannot do. We are part of the Spirit Wind blowing locally and internationally today.

Naturally, the way we yield to the Spirit's wings, fire, wind and breath influences our participation in the life of the Spirit. We can actively engage the people and systems around us—again as we are gifted, but the choice is always ours whether we will take the chance, step out and be the breath of the Spirit.

The Spirit is wildly free, working however and with whomever she wishes. The Spirit is not a tame force. But as Paul says, “All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.” The Spirit takes the lead. If we follow, we are children of God.

Martin Luther wrote this of the Holy Spirit, “I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with gifts, made me holy and kept me in the true faith...”  
(Commentary on the Third Article of the Apostles Creed.)

Pentecost is as simple as Christmas and Easter. God with us in the simplest of infant births, God with us in our learning to die with Jesus so that we may live with him as well. God with us in our gifts of being and acting. Flying with the wind of God. Saying yes to God. Waiting, Resting, Acting.

Pentecost is not about us. It's not about us getting it right. It's about God getting it right in the wings, fire, wind and breath. The Spirit is God moving in the winds of time, the fire of space, the wings and breath of the place in which we dwell right now. The Spirit cannot be boxed in or limited by our fears.

When Pentecost comes in our lives and churches, it's an unexpected surprise. When we follow a gut feeling. When we've just thrown up our hands in frustration or our spirits have sunk to a new low. When we've run up against that brick wall yet one more time. Suddenly, the Spirit breaks through. The Spirit makes the difference. Each of us could name moments of the Spirit.

Last week we recalled Paul and Silas' courageously following the Spirit in a ministry of compassion and passion from a jail cell to a jailer and back out to face the next experience of wind and fire.

There are two other sermons I wanted to preach today about the Spirit, but I will just mention them here—a sentence a piece.

As with Paul and Silas the Spirit leads us through times of suffering. The Spirit does not simply help us to jump from mountain top to mountain top.

Further, our failures tend to be more fertile ground for the Spirit than our successes because in them our egos shrink and we become amazingly open to what *God* is doing and let go of what *we* are doing.

Today is Pentecost, consider how the Spirit of God is burning, flying, blowing, and breathing life into your moments this week. Don't be afraid. We are clearly not alone in this, no matter how differently it might feel. Go with the Spirit. Say yes to the call of God in your life. If you can't hear the voice of God, then make time to listen. Sometimes multiple layers of stuff must be burned through, blown through, but there is wonder on the other side. Disappointment and suffering too. But where the Spirit of God is, there is life and peace, and hope. Thanks be to God. Amen