

The (Holy) Spiritual Embrace

- ² When the day of Pentecost had come, [the disciples] were all together in one place. ² And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every people under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered.... ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that ... in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power[?!]"

Pray. Come HS. Speak to us in our heart language. Draw us into the life of God, into the relationship between the Father and the Son.

-We typically equate our foolish actions with being 'human.' We use it as a negative. An excuse. We let our 'humanity' show. We're 'only human.'

But from a biblical perspective, it's Jesus who is truly human, who lives the redeemed human life. It's Jesus who shows us what we were meant for, what it looks like to come fully alive. We are most human when we are most like him.

But we also know we are a long way off from being like him. This week I struggled to forgive. Like: burned with anger and could not, would not, did not sleep – with a sense of betrayal. Not that I was not a part of the mess myself. But that just makes being angry even more exhausting and complicated and impossible. And no willpower was/is going to overcome that. No act of the intellect aspiring to virtue. Even years of practice and some particular gifting were and are eluding me. And I have felt broken. Weak. Unfaithful. Righteous. Self-righteous. Mean. And justified.

How do we become like *Jesus*? How do we become truly human in his love?

-Today we celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. God pouring the Life of God into us. Returning us to God. Restoring our true humanity.

The disciples were troubled as Jesus prepared them for his departure. They knew they weren't able to walk this way on their own. Jesus said he was 'sending another advocate.'

Another like Jesus to be their helper. To show them way to be human, to trust the God Jesus called Father, to learn his way of love. Another like Jesus, but not limited like Jesus in his humanity. The Holy Spirit. The Advocate. Comforter. Counselor. Encourager. God invisible bringing to completion the work of Christ in us and in the world. Unlimited by space and time to be at work upon everyone everywhere in ways we don't always know how.

So after Jesus' ascension, his disciples waited in Jerusalem as they had been instructed. And then it happened. They experienced the Holy Spirit like a wind. Like tongues of fire. Like being filled with God's truth and goodness. Like poetry and music, the sound of Love loving. God speaking in their own heart languages. The Spirit of Christ whispering like thunder in each person's chest.

If you fell in love with a person from Argentina, you might learn the Spanish language just to connect with them, to honor them, to close the gap, to communicate intimacy. And here the Holy Spirit comes to speak our heart language that we might know God.

Jerry Sittser - for years a professor at Whitworth University, and a mentor to our congregation as he helped us consider the beliefs and practices of following Christ. Jerry teaches that the primary responsibility of the Holy Spirit is to drive us to the God we know in the face of Jesus. To pursue us. To woo us. To speak our language and draw us into relationship with the God who is Father, Son and Spirit. To draw us into love of God that transforms us and makes us fully human.

-We Cravys have a chocolate Labrador named Moose. He's a year old now. And he So needs to be at the center of the action. Right at your feet. And if any two persons choose to offer one another an embrace under his watch, he goes nuts. Anyone have a bark collar we can borrow? It's too much. Moose just wants in. So his people have to include him in the hug. Now. Take away the frustrating nature of our pup. And consider all of us the dog in this analogy. The Spirit of God draws us into the embrace between Jesus and his Father. Into that personal, eternal, perfect bond of love.

How do we become truly human? Paul tells us (in Romans and Galatians) that it's not by willpower, not by moral ambition, but by God's Spirit bearing witness to our own spirits that we are children of God. By becoming God's kids. By dependence. By the Spirit giving us hearts to cry out, 'Abba, Father!' out of our need and longing and delight. If we are to become truly human, the persons we were made to be – truly loving and forgiving and humble and self-controlled – we need to be drawn into not a religion, but a relationship of love. Not a set of virtuous principles we can't live up to, but an intimacy with God that makes us glad to let go of our need for control, our craving for status, and our fear of obscurity.

-In book we will be reading this summer (*Practicing the Way*), John Mark Comer tells Marjorie Thompson's story of 'a conversation between an eighteenth century priest and an elderly peasant who would sit for long hours in the quiet of the church. When the priest asked what he was doing, the old man simply replied, 'I look at Him, He looks at me, and we are happy.' Comer calls this 'the apex of Christian spirituality,' affirming that 'the most important thing in all of life is to love and be loved by God.'

-Nadia Bolz Weber writes about a social experiment where teachers were given a random list of children's names to identify them as gifted. Do you know the result of their being considered gifted (even through no testing or previous achievement)? The children demonstrated gifts. They excelled. Shaped by loving expectations, they shone.

What happens when we are loved by God? We love like God.

-The good news is that God has poured out God's Spirit to draw us into the embrace of God's love. The primary work of the Spirit is to drive us into the embrace of Father, Son and Spirit.

And Sittser says this: 'There is nothing like weakness to make us aware of our need for God.'

Is it true? In your experience, is it true, that the Holy Spirit has worked in your weakness to draw you into love?

Me. Not only angry and unable to make myself want to forgive. My shoulder has been a debilitating weakness. In last 3 weeks I've discovered that this is a two-handed world. And a right-handed world. My right hand, my right arm, my right shoulder has been taken away. And it's been hard to eat. To dress. To put deodorant under my left armpit. To just get stuff, any stuff, done. The pain has meant not being able to concentrate or finish things that need to be done yesterday. And the things are piling up. And I can't even send emails very well. And I can't scribble notes. And I can't type without making me need a nap. And this last week the toilet was plugged I couldn't help. And the dog needed running. And the shirts needed to be put up on the shelf. And I couldn't mow the lawn. Or go for a mountain bike ride. And I am so over it.

So what do you do when you can't take off your own T-shirt. And you can't overcome your own fury. Let's just say that I'm glad to preach about weakness. I'm just not so glad to be weak.

Except. That there's nothing like weakness to make me aware of my need for God. For the Holy Spirit to draw me close.

Sittser says we are finite and fallen, fragile, feeble, faithless, feckless, and foolish. And by the gift of the Spirit, we cry out: Abba! Father. Holy is your name. Your kingdom come. Give us what we need. Give us the power to forgive. Give us the strength to avoid temptation.

I am weak. We are weak. And in my weakness, in your weakness, the Spirit of God nudges you. Drives you. Draws you into his unfailing love.

What weakness will you name before the Lord today? What need will draw you into communion with him?

Abba. Daddy. Father. The invitation of the Spirit is merely to dwell in his loving presence. It's called contemplative prayer. You only let your need draw you into God's embrace. Meaning you don't need words. You just sit in that love. You look at Him. He looks at you. And you can know his joy.

-The Lord has poured out his Spirit. And the promise is that the Spirit of God will bare witness in your spirit that you are a child of God, convict you of sin, lead you into truth, empower you for service, fill your heart with love for others, enable you to forgive, and strengthen you in your weakness.

-I want to invite you to sit in silence, trusting in the Invisible God to draw you into the embrace between the Father and the Son. And just enjoy being loved unconditionally. (silence)