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The Flow of the Spirit

Pentecost Sunday

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TEXT: Acts 2:1-21 (NASB)

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from Heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.

Now there were Jews living in Jerusalem, devout men from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the crowd came together, and were bewildered because each one of them was hearing them speak in his own language. They were amazed and astonished, saying, "Why, are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we each hear them in our own language to which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya around Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them in our own tongues speaking of the mighty deeds of God." And they all continued in amazement and great perplexity, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others were mocking and saying, "They are full of sweet wine."

But Peter, taking his stand with the eleven, raised his voice and declared to them: "Men of Judea and all you who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and give heed to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel:

“And it shall be in the last days,” God says,
“That I will pour forth of My Spirit on all mankind;
And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
And your young men shall see visions,
And your old men shall dream dreams;
Even on My bondslaves, both men and women,
I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit
And they shall prophesy.
“And I will grant wonders in the sky above
And signs on the earth below,
Blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke.
“The sun will be turned into darkness
And the moon into blood,
Before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come.
“And it shall be that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’

Dear friends:

The flow of the Spirit comes to every person's heart with a strong current of love from God. What a gift God has given us in the Holy Spirit, the third persona of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is God's gift for us to receive, and then for that Spirit to transform us.

If you went to northern Minnesota, you might view the headwaters of the mighty Mississippi River in Itasca State Park. It has a meager beginning, but as it steadily grows and swells, it becomes a powerful, rushing, life-giving river. It contains a lot of life: plants, fish... It sustains life for the animals that live in proximity to it, for the crops that grow along it, for the towns along the Mississippi. There are dams that harness the power of the flow of the current for electricity. Boats zoom across the surface; so do little water bugs. Children swim in the Mississippi River. It starts in a small, insignificant flow, but grows until it ends with a wide mouth, down by the Gulf of Mexico in Louisiana, mingling with the sea in a unity.

At Pentecost, God fulfilled his prophecies and promises by pouring out His Holy Spirit upon all people. Gentle in power but awesome and strength, God's spirit initiates new life. God's spirit gives us life, buoys us up, sustains our life, and ultimately carries us back to Himself. Jesus, you remember said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.” In one of T.S. Elliott's writings, he wrote, “The end of all our

exploring will be to arrive where we started and to know the place for the first time." All of life begins and ends with the Lord our God, and God's desire is that we know Him, that we love Him and trust Him. So the Spirit flows from the heart of God to empower that love relationship. The spirit still flows today. Do you feel it?

Acts 17 says, "In Him, we live and move and have our being." So just before Christ's ascension, he instructed his disciples to go to Jerusalem and wait for the promised gift of the Spirit: the outpouring of His powerful presence poured into the heart of every believer. They were gathered together in the upper room, surrounded by others who, like you, believe that Jesus is God's son. That He was crucified for the sins of the world, but raised from the dead to give us new life. He ascended into Heaven, and He promised that He'd come again. Then just think of it: we can hear the rush of a mighty wind, like a freight train. And all the people around us begin to glow as if a flame of light dances on their heads, and everyone begins to speak of the great things of God in languages that we've never learned. So the Spirit flows miraculously, first to speak the mighty deeds of God, and they hear the works of God in a miracle.

I read this week an excerpt from a portion of a book written by Annabel Stehli called "The Sound of a Miracle". It is the story of her daughter Georgie, who from birth and on had outbursts of autistic behavior. She was withdrawn, uncommunicative, she would disrupt things. She was behind in learning, emotionally flat. Georgie, for years, had special effort to bring her out of this trouble: multitude of institutions, countless doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, special schools, tutors, all with very limited success. And then it was discovered that she was oversensitive in hearing. There were certain frequencies of sound waves that caused her terror or were very painful. Georgie could hear street noises from a block away, toilets flushing in another part of a large apartment building, blood rushing in her veins, oceans, almost like tidal wave after tidal wave, and a rain storm sounded like a machine gun attack. Then Dr. [Guy] Berard of France, who had diagnosed her problem, assisted in correcting her hearing, removing the oversensitivity. And Georgie's life was changed forever.

Sinners in our world have exactly the opposite problem. We are desensitized with our spiritual hearing to be deaf to the voice of God. We withdraw from God. The result is that many of us live as if God doesn't exist, and we dismiss the word of God as if it's not important. Many in the world think that Jesus, who lived 2,000 years ago, couldn't possibly still be relevant today. Then the flow of the Spirit comes to open our ears to

hear the mighty things of God; that an all-powerful God left the glory of Heaven to come to our planet in His son Jesus. That He was killed on the cross, driven by nails through his hands and feet. And His blood trickled down that wood that held Him there, seeped and soaked through the years, to fall on my hands because my guilt caused His execution. Christ's blood is on my hands, but Christ's blood soaks to my heart and cleanses my sins away. Jesus forgives me. God so loved the world that whoever believes in the Him, His son, has eternal life. Are you among the "whosoever that believes"? It says in John 1, "As many as receive Jesus, to them God gives the power to become the children of God." Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ."

But the flow of the spirit comes also so we can confess Jesus. In 1 Corinthians 12 it says, "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord', except by the Holy Spirit." Years ago, there was an ocean ship that strayed off course near San Diego, California. It was stuck on a reef at low tide. Twelve tugboats were hooked up to it and attempted to pull it off the reef. But finally, the captain sent all of those tugboats home. "I'll just be patient and wait." He waited for high tide, the captain did, and all of a sudden, the ocean rising did what human power couldn't do. The rising tide of the Pacific Ocean lifted that ship and put it back into the channel waters. Sin is like that: we get stuck in certain attitudes or perceptions, certain habits. We become deaf to God's voice calling us in His love. We become rebellious. We become unwilling to confess our need for Christ. Then the flow of the Spirit lifts us to see our selfishness, our destructiveness, our rebellion.

And the Spirit opens our mouth to confess Jesus in faith. The Spirit invites us to receive Jesus. "If we confess with our lips 'Jesus is Lord', and believe in our hearts that God raised Him from the dead, we will be saved." it says in Romans 10. Today, many of us have slid far away from God. We've drifted out of touch. Our faith has grown cold or died altogether. But the truth of Pentecost is still true today. In Acts 2, we read, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." You remember the lyric of "Beneath the Cross of Jesus", that old hymn? "To wonders I confess, the wonder of His glorious love and my unworthiness."

So today I confess two things: I'm a sinner needing forgiveness; I deserve the judgment of God. But I also confess that Jesus is God's son, my Savior, the risen Lord. And by His death and resurrection, Jesus has saved me from my sin. I trust in Him. Is that your confession?

In the flow of the Spirit, He also makes us die to our sin and rise to new life. Each spring rivers flood, and we hear of people who get trapped in the undercurrent and the swift flowing current, high water, people who drowned, who lose their lives. When the Spirit washes over me, as an individual, and the truth is my warped heart and corrupt sin now takes me under, and the Spirit raises me to new life. We read in Romans 6 that I was buried with Jesus Christ by baptism, immersed into His death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, I, too, might walk in newness of life. Or listen to the imagery of Galatians 2:20: "I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live by faith, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loves me and gave Himself for me."

So, the flow of the Spirit, now, I want to be filled and live under the influence of the Spirit. It's interesting that in several places in the scripture, it uses the analogy of someone who is overcome with wine or alcohol; that we are "living under the influence." We know that when someone is drunk, their mood changes, their attitude changes, their thoughts and speech change. Even the way they walk is affected. The scripture says, "Don't be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Holy Spirit." So now God's spirit helps us live under the influence, with mood that is joy and an attitude that expects the blessing of God, and our thoughts and our speech honor the Lord. And the way we carry ourselves in life: we walk in the newness of life. In a mystery, I don't understand, I drink of the waters of the Spirit of Jesus' life and I'm made new. But in the flow of the Spirit, I receive God's love and I now can give love. In 1 John 4 we read, "This is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us, and gave His son Jesus for our sins. We love because God first loved us." You remember how Paul, in Ephesians 3, said he prays that we be strengthened with power through the Holy Spirit so that Jesus may live in our hearts, and that we would know the love of Christ in a way that surpasses knowledge. Jack London, in his masterpiece classic book "The Call of the Wild", which recently has been made into a popular movie, tells the story of a magnificent dog named Buck: half Saint Bernard, half Shepherd. He's 150 pounds of pure muscle. He's stolen and kidnapped off the streets of San Francisco. As such an impressive animal, he's hauled to Alaska and sold to be a sled dog in the wilderness. But he was treated so cruelly by his captors and then by his first owners that his spirit was nearly broken. Then he came under the kind ownership of a man named John Thornton. And Buck developed an undying love and devotion for John. One evening in a conversation in the Eldorado saloon, Thornton was lured into making a thousand dollar

wager that Buck could break a thousand-pound load from a frozen standstill and move it 100 yards. While some dogs might be able to do a 500 pounds... 600... But a thousand pound load seemed impossible. The men spilled out of the saloon to see if Buck could possibly perform this feat. The sled holding 20 50-pound bags of flour was standing frozen in the snow, and the 10-dog team that was pulling it were released and Buck was harnessed in its place. Thornton knelt down, put his face against the face of his great dog and whispered in his ear, "As you love me, Buck. As you love me." And Buck did it. He pulled the sled, "As you love me, Buck, as you love me."

So today, believer, in the flow of the Holy Spirit, Jesus would whisper into your ears, "As you love me, child, as you love me." When guilt haunts you in the night, when situations are too tough, when people are impossible, love. When life overwhelms you, Jesus kneels down to where you are and says, "As you love me, child, as you love me." So the flow of the Spirit comes to each believer. What a gift! Thank you, Lord.

Amen.