

**June 9, 2019 Day of Pentecost**  
**Rev. Jen Nagel, University Lutheran Church of Hope**

**Acts 2:1-21, Romans 8:14-17**  
**John 14:8-17**

**Grace and peace, Spirit and power, to you this holy day. Amen.**

**In John's Gospel we hear:**

"But you can recognize the Spirit because she remains with you and will be within you."

**People of God, join me, please, in that Spirit:** Take a breath, a deep a breath ... and let it out.

And again, another breath ... and let it go.

"You can recognize the Spirit because she remains with you and will be within you."

**I've been thinking this week about how we do, or often don't, recognize the Spirit.**

**In the Hebrew Bible**, the Old Testament, the Spirit is there from the start, literally the 2<sup>nd</sup> verse of Genesis. It's the Spirit, the wind, the Ruach in Hebrew, the breath of God, that blows over the waters at creation. It's that same Spirit that dries the land after the flood, and rattles the dry bones when Ezekiel wonders, "Can these bones live?"

It's the Spirit that inspires prophets, and the Spirit that claims Jesus, Beloved, at his baptism.

It's the Spirit, the advocate, that Jesus promises will stay with them, *really, with us*, forever.

No longer will we be bound by fear, but instead we are adopted into freedom.

It's the Spirit that blows, breathes through the community on that Pentecost with wind and flame.

And the Spirit that gives understanding, recognition, actually interpretation, as that crowd—each in their own language—begins to tell about God's deeds of power, what God is doing in them and through them.

**The miracle of Pentecost**, it seems to me, is not so much that the Spirit showed up, she'd been doing that over and over again, since the very start of creation.

**The miracle, then, is that the community recognized what was happening.**

Let me say that again: The miracle is that the community recognized what was happening.

Maybe they didn't even realize *what* was happening, but rather that *something* was happening.

That's all it took, and then the visions and the dreams didn't seem quite so impossible anymore.

And people gathered, and healing happened, and stories were shared.

God's Spirit was on the loose, and they recognized it.

**Did they understand it? I'm not so sure, nor do they seem to need to.**

That comes later when the church gets more institutionalized and defined, when the Spirit goes undercover. We're still mucking around in those definitions now days.

But in this new season of reformation (yes, I believe it's happening again) [in this season] we are witnessing a loosening of tight controls and a trust, like in Acts, that the Spirit is still at work in us and through us.

**I'll be honest**, recognizing the Holy Spirit is edgy, even dangerous, we might be changed in the process. And, at once, recognizing the Holy Spirit, can be a tremendous comfort: even in our fear, we are not alone.

**A few weeks back I happened to overhear the** choir as their pre-service rehearsal was finishing.

It was a big Sunday and you'd practiced hard and you sounded great.

Zach had a few final words of guidance.

He said something like: "You sound awesome, don't be concerned or exacting, be open."

I don't share that to give away the choir's secrets, but because I think the rest of us—me included—can take this advice: don't be concerned or exacting, be open.

In other words, let the Holy Spirit move through you, in you.

**Before Hope, I served a small congregation** that was in the midst of really big transformation.

The transformation had themes like: *Should we live or should we die?*

And, *If we live, should we do ministry in the building we'd had forever, a building that was no longer sustainable? Or could we envision moving or changing?*

*What about partnerships with other congregations, how would that look? Could it work.*

The thing I learned the most in that whole wonderful, complicated journey was this:

I learned to recognize and lean into the Holy Spirit in a way that I never had before—and, truly, it changed my ministry, and it changed me.

I found words to describe the Spirit we witnessed: nimble, mysterious, creative, powerful, weaving, dancing, inspiring freeing, persisting, evolving, courageous, brave, spacious, edgy, risky, open.

Most of all, I gained a sense of muscle memory,  
maybe it's a recognition,  
perhaps it's just a trust in the Spirit's activity.

**Witness it, trust it a few times**, and it gets easier to spot the Spirit whispered in the pain,  
or unleashed in the promise, or weaving in and out in beauty, or making a path out of no way.

The Spirit doesn't operate on the world's terms, it's not business as usual, or even success as usual.

**I sense and recognize** the Holy Spirit at work here at Hope—do you?

In the decision to welcome Intern Linqing, or begin a Farmers Market, or build the bread oven.

In becoming a sanctuary congregation and listening deeply, and making our walls more porous...the Spirit is alive.

On Wednesday evening, in this space, twelve students graduated from PEASE Academy, the sober high school that shares our building.

All of these students had been through treatment a time or two or more, between them they shared 2,831 days of sobriety.

Honestly, they'd been through hell, and their families too—literally not knowing if the one they loved would survive—some of you know this journey all too well.

With only twelve grads there is time for the staff to offer a few words to each grad and then for the students to share.

They said things like, "I never thought I'd be standing at my graduation," or "You saved my life," or "Thank you for not giving up on me."

Not every 18 year old will stand up in front of a community and declare this much truth.

The ground was holy, very holy, and the Spirit was present.

**People of God, people of the Spirit**, over this week, I invite you to watch for the Holy Spirit on the loose.

Where do you recognize her tethering your hopes,

weaving together the gifts and the needs,

breathing deeply through creation and in your very lungs?

How are you recognizing the Holy Spirit in your life?

**Last Sunday evening**, long time member, Joy Thompson, died.

Joy was 86 years old and is loved by her spouse Phil Thompson, their two children, their four grandchildren, and a raft of friends.

Joy was born in a little Scottish American community near the Canadian border in northwestern North Dakota, and she grew up in northwestern Minnesota.

While her husband Phil's artwork is prominent around our building—this large piece is one of his, and there are more—Joy was *also* an art teacher, also an artist, and, in particular, a weaver.

Joy would dye her own fibers, and create beautiful pieces, rich in color and texture.

A visit to their home in Prospect Park means venturing into a luscious space, filled with light and color, history and stories, art work of all sorts.

Joy wove these together, in beauty—and, truly, they had a Holy Spirit quality.

In these recent years Joy has cared faithfully for Phil in their home.

With the quick onset of some sort of virus, Joy died unexpectedly.

There'll be a memorial service, but the details are still in the works.

**When members of this congregation die,**

we remember how the same waters that first washed over them in baptism, hold them in death.

We pray at the baptismal font, linking ourselves to God's powerful Spirit in the waters of promise.

**Take a breath, a deep a breath ... and let it out.**

And again, another breath ... and let it go.

In life, in death, the Spirit is breathing in us and through us.

**Let us pray...Holy God, holy and powerful, we remember before you today our sister Joy Thompson. We thank you for giving her to us to know and to love as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth. At these waters of baptism, you welcomed her into your love. At these waters, you comforted her in times of trouble and encouraged her in delight. At these waters, you now enfold her into Jesus' death and resurrection and the promise of life everlasting. Console us who mourn and bring us together to feast with all the saints of God. In the Spirit's power, we pray. Amen.**