

God's Love Song

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Text: Romans 8:14-17, John 14:15-17, Acts 2:1-21

Romans 8:14-17

All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

John 14:15-17

Jesus told his disciples, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever. This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you."

Acts 2:1-21

When the day of Pentecost had come, [Jesus' followers] were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

In our extended family, it was the aunties who brought everything together for the reunions: behind the scenes, renewing the mountains of food, setting out meal after meal, endlessly washing dishes and wiping down tables. While the young parents and carefree singles went swimming or boating, and the uncles anchored lawn chairs in the shade, solving the great problems of the world, it was the aunties who solved our problems, patched up our little wounds, soothed our traumas, remembered our birthdays, and generally approved of us.

They loved us, each one. And they made us one family. When my own mother died, and I was grieving alone in Japan, my aunties stepped in, sending tender letters, full of consolation.



The Holy Spirit is called by many names, too many to mention. So today I'll call her Auntie. We have Father, we have Son; why not Auntie? OK, it's not strictly biblical. But then, the Holy Spirit is the most unnamable and mysterious person of the Trinity. How do you experience Spirit? Wind, fire, dove? As advocate, counselor, helper? The Light within? The wise one whispering in your ear? The deep peace you feel as you enter sleep? Maybe all of these. And more. The Holy Spirit is like my aunties because she's always there, but never screaming for attention. She's always in motion, but never in a hurry. And she is pure, unwavering love. She's the right answer in every dilemma: because there is no situation for which love is not an appropriate response. The Holy Spirit is God's love song to the world.

This week, in my reading and praying about Pentecost, I encountered something I think I never really got before. The Holy Spirit has two main jobs: one is creating diversity, breathing out life in endlessly new forms. No two snowflakes or two leaves are identical, as we all know. And the other job is connecting. The Holy Spirit is the Great Connector. She brings all that diversity back

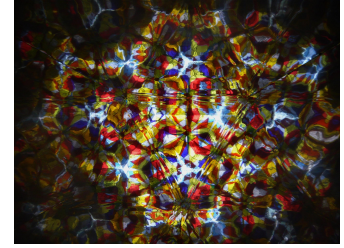


together in a glorious whole, like one snowy landscape, one forest wrapped in beauty. Just as my aunties brought harmony to our family, and wholeness to our gatherings. Just as the Spirit on Pentecost came in a welter of languages to be heard and understood by people from every nation under heaven, one listening whole as the disciples spoke.*



Maybe the Holy Spirit is hard to name because she's never static, never still, always at work doing something helpful, something you may not even notice. Loving one single rosebud into blossom, loving the mass of flowers into a garden, a living palette of color. The key word, I think, is living.

As a single note is not yet a song, as a song is not yet a symphony, as a symphony is not alive until the orchestra begins to play, I think God isn't real to us until the Spirit moves in us, as the kaleidoscope of our imagination and the breath in our bodies. One image does not make a kaleidoscope and one breath does not make a life; it is breath after breath, hour after hour, year after year.



The Holy Spirit is God's love song to the world, a world desperately in need of love. When your inner world is bleak and barren, she is God's love song to you. She is the living breath of the world. No one word or image can describe her, but know that when you pray, she is praying within you, not simply as words in your mouth, but pulsing to every part of your body, filling every part of your soul. When we cry to God in our pain, it is the Spirit bearing witness with us that God is real, that God hears. The Spirit then is not simply a bird - but a bird in flight. Not simply a lone bird, but a myriad of birds, moving in infinitely varied design.

I offer for your meditation one of God's great wonders: a murmuration of starlings - a gathering of hundreds of thousands of birds moving together in strange and intricate patterns. As you watch, listen to a poem in two parts, written in the 19th century, but still offering hope that God's Spirit has the power to renew the earth:

Starling Murmuration God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade, bleared, smeared with toil,
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell; the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last light off the black West went,
Morning at the brown brink eastward springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent world broods
With warm breast and with ah! bright wings.



Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit, Holy Mystery - God's renewing breath.
Or you can simply call her "Auntie." Amen. Thanks be to God.

*I am indebted to Richard Rohr's observation on the two main jobs of the Spirit from his book *The Divine Dance* - a wonderful commentary on the Trinity.

Prayers

Creating God, sometimes this world feels old and sad to us; we live in the busy-ness of our lives, but the big picture is too vast and uncomfortable to grasp. Send forth your Spirit; renew the fire of your love, renew the fire in us.

Where tragedy and destruction seem to reign, send your Spirit of comfort, hope, and rebirth. Help us sing a song of love in Ukraine and Uvalde, and wherever there is hurt that needs healing.

We give thanks for the accomplishments of our graduates. May your Light within and your divine purpose guide them in the next chapters of their lives.

Breathe your tender Spirit into those especially dear to our hearts. Speak to the hearts of all your people and breathe into us the fire of your love; we pray in Jesus' name. Amen