

“Storytelling With the Spirit”

by Rev. Nancy Landauer

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I'd like you to take a moment and look at the cover of the bulletin. I love this picture. It was done in the 1400's. It is someone's imaginative art work of what the very first Pentecost looked like. The people men and women are in a circle. Up above the Holy Spirit in the shape of a dove is coming down to each one of the people gathered there. When I look at the picture I see in my own imagination a round table where everyone is gathered.

What an experience that must have been. Up until that time, Jesus had been making resurrection appearances. His friends understood that Jesus was still with them, however on Pentecost they all received a new theological understanding. Jesus was not only still among them, the Holy Spirit that was inside Jesus was also inside them. God was not only among them, God was inside them.

In the gospel of John, when Jesus realizes his arrest is imminent, Jesus says to the disciples, I will not leave you orphaned, I will not abandon you, but I will send you the Holy Spirit, the Advocate, the Comforter to dwell in you. At one point Jesus breathes on the disciples and says, have some breath, have some spirit.

The concept of God entering into our spirits through breath is no a new concept with Jesus, I discovered in Egypt. I was so surprised the first time I looked up at the walls of the tomb and saw a goddess giving the breath of life to the pharaoh. After the first scene I saw the same scene in a variety of tombs. I couldn't help think of Jesus giving divine breath to the disciples.

We need breath in order to exist; we need the spirit of God in order to live well. One thing that is very different from the tombs of the pharaohs and the life giving breath of Jesus is that in the tombs of Egypt, divine breath is given only to the pharaohs. At Pentecost, the divine breath, or the Holy Spirit is given to everyone. The story tells us that divine breath filled each person and tongues of flame. The story shows us that something got into each one of them. The rubberneckers thought that all the Galileans were filled with alcohol. We know they were filled with God.

Peter reminds everyone of the words of 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 elders shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women I shall pour out my spirit and they shall prophecy.”

What a wonderful quote for Peter to use. God promises to pour out the Holy Spirit upon all human flesh. God does not declare that only some flesh, straight flesh, or monogamous flesh, or celibate flesh, or orderly, decent flesh will receive the Spirit. No, God says all flesh. So no matter who we are, or how unworthy we may suspect that we are, every single one of us here today are the recipients of this special gift.

What is prophecy, this gift that we all receive? I remember in a preaching class at seminary. Our professor, a woman who is nationally known for her preaching abilities, had us participate in an activity on the first day of class. There were about ten people in the class. She had us do a visual imagery prayer. We shut our eyes, took a deep breath and then when we felt calm and centered, she asked us to imagine putting on a robe and then she slowly had us image climbing into the pulpit at our home church. She gave us a

few minutes to think of what we might like to say, or to think of a bible verse we wanted to share, anything. Then when we opened our eyes she asked us what the experience had been like. I so clearly remember, the first woman she asked to share the experience looked absolutely crest fallen. She said, “when I imagined myself in the pulpit, no words came out, nothing, I thought of nothing. I was completely silent.” Tears started to roll down her cheeks.

I will never forget that woman. She had great passion for Christ and yet her voice had been silenced. Silenced! How do we get silenced when we have been given the gift of prophecy?

I think it happens often in our society. I think it happens to both men and women. Rachel Reman a pediatric md, and a Jungian analyst wrote a book called kitchen table wisdom. In the first chapter she tells that when she was young, her family sat around the kitchen table and told stories. It was a slower paced life when evenings could be spent talking to each other; we could tell stories that didn't have a beginning or an end. They were stories that didn't necessarily have a moral point to them; just stories that often subtly explored wisdom. Everyone got to tell their stories, no one was exempt.

I think in our culture, we are very short on family storytelling. Families are so programmed that there often is no family dinner hour. Everyone has an evening of activities planned and everyone has to eat at a different time. Parents come home from work at different times. Children have basketball practice, or gymnastics or choir, or clarinet lessons. Everyone eats and dashes off. No time for leisurely story telling, in fact no time for prayer and no time for loving encouragement and connection.

Sometimes I have asked people to tell me their story and they tell me their achievements, they give me their resume. They don't even know their own story. They have lost their identity.

Most parents know the importance of telling their children their own story, and telling them over and over again so that they know in their own story who they are and where they come from and to whom they belong. Rachel Remen says at the kitchen table we do this for each other. The stories at the kitchen table are about the same things; stories of owning, having and losing, stories of sex, of power, of pain, of wounding, of courage, hope and healing, of loneliness and the end of loneliness, stories about God. If we think we have no stories to tell, it is because we haven't been listening carefully enough and we haven't paid enough attention to our lives. Most of us touched by the Spirit live lives that are far richer and far more meaningful than we appreciate.

We carry with us every story we have ever heard and every story we have ever lived, filed away in some deep place until we have grown into the capacity to need the story or understand the unsuspected meaning in the story.

When we understand that the Holy Spirit is in each of us, just waiting to help us bring our stories and their meaning forth, then we will be realizing the power that the Holy Spirit has given us. We can't wait until we are called to the pulpit, we need to start now, at the kitchen table. Reading self-help books and reading other peoples' stories is not a great deal of use, if you don't have time to practice telling and listening to others' stories. Plan a family night with no TV and no video games and no computer games. If you don't have children at home, borrow someone else. If you don't have access to

someone else's call your neighbor, better yet, invite a neighbor you don't know over for coffee. Still better, join a group at church.

We have the gift of prophecy. We have the ability to dream dreams and see visions. We have the ability to share the meaning of our stories with others. Every single one of us has the ability because we are the children of God. We have the gift of the Spirit. Join the circle, the kitchen table circle, the women's circle, the men's circle, the circle around the altar. Don't get caught without a voice.