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 Redwoods Presbyterian Church
 Larkspur, California
 June 12, 2011
 Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; John 7:37-39, John 20:19-23
 "Spirit of the Living God"

On this Day of Pentecost one expects the lectionary texts to be filled with expressions of the spirit. They are. I chose three readings from the group.

In the Psalms the spirit is the agent of creation. The spirit gives life to everything and when the spirit departs creation dies. The spirit gives life to human beings and when the spirit goes we die. We give up the ghost, as the saying goes.

In reading the psalms today we can confidently say that all life is endowed and imbued with the spirit. The spirit is in trees, oceans, mountains, sea life, animals and humans – everything! We call this a "general" expression of spirit.

We find *another* expression of the spirit in the gospels which we call a "special" expression. It comes to human beings.

The first gospel text has Jesus crying out: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, 'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" The text continues: "Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified."

There is "spirit" in the general sense but not this "Spirit!"

In the second gospel text Jesus departs from the earth but before he goes he breathes on his disciples and says: "Receive the Holy Spirit..."

It's in Jesus that we have a new dimension of "spirit." It is given to the disciples in addition to the "general" spirit in each of them. This new spirit is the Holy Spirit – a kind of Jesus infusion – given to the disciples. It will continue to be in or with the disciples and thus in every follower of Jesus down the centuries and to us in this church.

The Holy Spirit as we know is the third person of the trinity. It's the spirit that empowers Jesus' disciples to be about the work that Jesus began.

To recap: Every human being is a spiritual being in the psalmist sense. Followers of Jesus come alive in a new way with the spirit given them by Jesus. It's the way of Jesus. It's the "spirit of the living God" that falls afresh on people in every age and clime as the hymn writer, Daniel Iverson, states.

The Holy Spirit comes to the disciples in wonderful ways, in water, breath and flames affirming the dynamic and grounded nature of this spirit.

We have seen the Holy Spirit in human beings in South Africa and this country where the church was at the forefront of racial justice; in people like Catholic sister Dorothy Stang working with and on behalf of indigenous people in the Amazon, and in Helen Morita and Faith in Practice whose mission is to improve the physical, spiritual, and economic conditions of poor in Guatemala through short-term surgical, medical and dental mission trips and health-related educational programs.

We have seen it as the good news of Jesus saving love shared to diplomat and ditch digger, to urban black Zimbabwean and suburban white Zimbabwean, to everybody in every situation.

The Presbyterian *Book of Confessions* helps us understand this aspect of Jesus' gift to us and God's personality for us.

Our latest confession of faith, "A Brief Statement of Faith," written for the Presbyterian Church (USA) in the latter part of the twentieth century, speaks most relevantly to us on the subject. I've printed the Holy Spirit portion of it in the bulletin.

We will say it together as a communal expression of this sermon. Before we do some comments about the statement:

It's the third leg of a Trinitarian statement which tells us what the church believes about God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit portion applies directly to us. It is God in us. It helps us understand who we are as Christians.

Please turn to your insert for the statement and let us say it together:

**We trust in God the Holy Spirit,
 everywhere the giver and renewer of life.
 The Spirit justifies us by grace through faith,
 sets us free to accept ourselves and to love God and neighbor,
 and binds us together with all believers
 in the one body of Christ, the Church.
 The same Spirit
 who inspired the prophets and apostles
 rules our faith and life in Christ through Scripture,
 engages us through the Word proclaimed,
 claims us in the waters of baptism,
 feeds us with the bread of life and the cup of salvation,
 and calls women and men to all ministries of the church.
 In a broken and fearful world
 the Spirit gives us courage
 to pray without ceasing,
 to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
 to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
 to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,**

**and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace.
In gratitude to God, empowered by the Spirit,
we strive to serve Christ in our daily tasks
and to live holy and joyful lives,
even as we watch for God's new heaven and new earth,
praying, "Come, Lord Jesus!"**

**With believers in every time and place,
we rejoice that nothing in life or in death
can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.**

[From "A Brief Statement of Faith," lines 52-79]

Isn't that empowering? Take for example the seven lines:

"In a broken and fearful world
the Spirit gives us courage
to pray without ceasing,
to witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior,
to unmask idolatries in Church and culture,
to hear the voices of peoples long silenced,
and to work with others for justice, freedom, and peace. "

There's a bunch of sermons or an adult education event in these lines.

- To witness among all peoples to Christ as Lord and Savior is to tell people about Jesus' authority which is an authority not to jump off a cliff but to be more loving, compassionate and caring and to see Jesus as a healer (Savior comes from the root "salve" to heal) in other words Jesus as the one who makes us whole. The sole criterion for becoming a member of the church is to affirm Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. It's absolutely lovely when we know what it means.
- Unmasking idolatries in Church and culture. What are the idols in church and culture? In culture idols could be what one theologian calls "money, sex or power" and in the church some call it indifference or the use of guilt, fear, shame and intimidation to keep people in line. Some people grew up in churches ruled by these idols and visit recovery from spiritual abuse websites (like churchabuse.com) and get great information and counsel or they attend spiritual abuse recovery groups. Some churches have what is called a "prosperity gospel" which says God blesses the faithful with lots of money. The richer you are the more faithful you are. This has to be idolatry.
- Who are the "people long silenced." What are their "voices?" The Brief Statement of Faith is a 1980s document. Today, with the internet we hear most voices. The question is: Are we listening? I thought I was quite aware of racial ethnic concerns until my dream told me on Friday night that I wasn't. Are we listening to people with disabilities, people of various racial ethnic backgrounds and indigenous people around the world. Some say Islamic communities in the US have been silenced. The

important thing here is to speak and listen to people who are different from us. We'll make mistakes but we'll learn from our mistakes and hopefully make friends in the process.

- To work with others for justice, freedom and peace could mean in one sense to network with green and socially responsible organizations. That's why Suellen and I go to the Green Festival very year and last year we went to the Bioneers Conference at the Marin Center, San Rafael. We've met John Gorton at both locations.

There's a ton of stuff. Take this statement on the Holy Spirit home and meditate on it and see what God still wants to say to you – to us. Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on me. Amen.