

Pentecost in the Christian church is celebrated as the time when the early disciples experienced a powerful coming of God's Holy Spirit... that came with a loud sound, like the rush of wind, and with some sort of electric energy, like tongues of fire, dancing on their heads! They were all gathered in Jerusalem, probably joining celebrations of the Feast of Weeks, which was 50 days after Passover, and thus about 50 days after Jesus' death and resurrection. In Bible times, the number 7 was a symbolic number of completion, so 7 weeks times 7 days was 49 days of "completion" of the Exodus from slavery in Egypt. So the 50th day symbolized a whole new start, a day of new beginnings. Christians remember the 50th day after Jesus' resurrection as the powerful coming of Spirit in wind and fire, and in the gift of speaking in foreign tongues.

Here in New England, it seems most Christians are a bit skeptical or reserved about expressing gifts of Spirit, like dancing in the spirit, shouting in the spirit; we get skeptical about even outward enthusiasm for God! And maybe for good reason. I listened to some pentecostal preachers this week from the Pentecostal Church of Chile; I had done a lot of church exchange work and interpreting for them back in the 90's. The preachers at getting the crowd into a heightened emotional state, leading by example! The first speaker, a young woman pastor, was very loud, very emotional, at times almost sobbing as she was speaking and shouting. Her words included tales of woe, tales of sickness, and necessity of calling on God's spirit. The next speaker, an older man, and Bishop of the Chilean church, was also very loud, very passionate, imploring the crowd to "rekindle the spirit" as we hear Paul saying in the opening of his 2nd letter to Timothy. This particular worship service was part of their week-long annual meeting, and while I fast-forwarded through much of it, my YouTube video said it was THREE HOURS long! The music was very lively, including all kinds of

instruments! You can bet that worshipping for 3 hours involves some repetition; the bishop challenged the crowd over and over, louder and louder, in many ways, to “rekindle the spirit” that God had given them, to rekindle the fire within, to fan the flames in their hearts! It reminded me of the annual meeting I attended in Chile back in the 90’s when one preacher challenged the crowd about being “really” Pentecostal; the implication was that if they were “really,” full of the spirit, there would be more of them dancing in the isles, more singing praises at top of lungs, more falling onto knees in prayer, more raising hands shouting Gory be to God (said 3 times!)

So you may note a bit of skepticism: Is God really coming in power, like a rushing wind, and flames of fire, and ecstatic speech, or is the crowd sort of whipping itself up into a frenzy?) To entertain the latter, all we have to do is think of some professional sports games and see the contagion of enthusiasm, of fans cheering “fanatically! All we have to do is think of wonderful concerts, with songs to better the world, like “Imagine” and “If I had a hammer” and “Blowin’ in the Wind!” I’m sure some of those songs have indeed been sung in many languages around the world, and everyone does understand the simple message of love and peace regardless what language it is in.

Being “taken over” by the spirit, feeling full even overflowing with spirit, being filled with a power and healing presence from beyond... seems to be a goal of many Pentecostal Christians. As I’ve said, it could be analogous to a loud and contagious enthusiasm, like at a concert, or in a close sports competition! Psalm 100 famously says “Make a joyful noise unto the Lord. Come into God’s presence with singing!” Psalm 150 talks about using many instruments for praise!

But what about the quietness of the spirit, of what the prophet also called “the still small voice”... or the quietness of waiting for new life? Psalm 46 talks about “Being Still” to know God

and trust in God, and Psalm 23 talks about God leading us beside Still Waters, and lying down in Green pastures. Naturally, the Bible itself declares there are many ways and many postures for getting in touch with the Spirit of God.

The two main entities mentioned at Pentecost were Fire and Wind. When the Christian writings speak of Spirit, they often use the Greek word *pneuma*, that also means WIND. Wind becomes for us a symbol and a reality of being alive, a reference to our very breathing! I think of Yoga, the emphasis on our breath, and I think of sports, the exhilaration and steady breathing in walking, running, biking, swimming, etc!

But this morning, I'd like to be a bit self-indulgent and point to MUSIC, as being a key vehicle to experiencing God. And even more specifically, SINGING!... Singing involves dependence on breath, carrying the tone on a short breath, or a long breath, a soft or loud tone, a high or low tone.. singing matches and carries the emotions of our human lives. We remember the famous phrase attributed to St. Augustine, that To Sing is to Pray twice. Using words and lyrics about God, the connection with God becomes even deeper by letting the words flow through our bodies, flow in and out on our breath.

Renee' Fleming, a highly acclaimed singer of our time, just edited a book about music and music therapy to heal the mind and the body. So many stories about how music helps children with developmental problems, seniors with dementia, and even those with physical illnesses like MS.

One story in the book is about a traumatic brain injury: it tells of a 17-year old boy named Forrest who had a snowboard accident, slamming into a fence headfirst, with no helmet. He awoke from a coma only being able to move his eyes. His music teacher since grade school began doing music therapy with him. One milestone in healing

was tapping his fingers to a Beatles tune. Another milestone in rehab was his being able to make a puff of air, a small peep, into a recorder put to his lips. Forrest needed to regain ability to swallow, and to make sounds from his vocal chords. His music therapist started asking him to mimic or repeat a humming sound, and Forrest could only make a very faint hum for about 10 months. About a year into the therapy, he started to hum a bit longer and take deeper breaths. One day she sang the phrase “Good Morning” and he sang back, “Good morning!” She said: “The world stopped and the caregiving team stood there awestruck.” Within six months after the breakthrough, Forrest was able to sing short sentences, and he got his speaking voice back. More than 10 years later, Forrest went to college, can drive a car, and raises awareness for helmet safety! He was in a documentary called “Music Got Me Here.”

What Christians call The Holy Spirit is really a Universal Spirit that appears in many languages, in many cultures, thus in many religions. It can come in many ways, as loud shouting of praise, as with Pentecostal worship, or as quiet prayer and peaceful comfort, as in more reserved worship settings like ours. It can come through the repetition of beautiful sayings about God, especially in choruses of songs, choruses that are repeated over and over and sink deep into our minds and hearts. (Like the murmur of a dove, come Holy Spirit, come! Every time I feel the spirit moving in my heart, I will pray!) God’s Spirit comes as sheer “gift” from beyond, but we also can do our part; we can “rekindle the gift” with reading and prayer and singing. With such regular practice, we will experience both the comforting presence of God and the fiery power of God. Come Holy Spirit, Come! Amen.