

In the Flow John 7:37-39

St. Marks UMC, Charleston, WV Pentecost Sunday (June 4) 2017

³⁷ On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, “If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Today, as we read together the Call to Worship, we heard the usual reading from Acts chapter 2, for this Day of Pentecost – the birth of the Church. And it’s especially powerful to celebrate the Birth of the Church on this same day when we celebrate the birth of Sydney Williamson and Mary Young into the Church as members.

But this year, I felt led to take us to the Gospel lesson for this day, when Jesus talked about what was going to come, after his death, resurrection, and ascension – the Gift of the Holy Spirit. Oh yes, there is the well known account of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in which tongues, like divided fire, came down upon the disciples and everyone was able to hear the Good News in their own language, like they were all plugged into to the earphones at the United Nations or the United Methodist General Conference.

But Jesus talks about another aspect of this Spirit, that comes to all who thirst, and which flows like water through their lives, through their souls.

Jesus understood the notion of FLOW, as did every Palestinian, who knew about the Sea of Tiberias/Galilean Sea that flowed into the River Jordan, where fishermen made their living, and which eventually flowed into the DEAD SEA, which was called that because there was no outlet. Once the water came into this sea, it lay stagnant, and no life form could survive.

It was the DEAD Sea, because it had no flow.

The Holy Spirit comes in a flow.

Next week, Jennifer Rhule will be preaching on Trinity Sunday, while Janet and I are at Annual Conference, and she may talk about the flow then, as she talks about the Holy Trinity. The Trinity is the perfect example of this FLOW that Jesus discusses. The Father gives to the Son who gives to the Spirit who returns it to the Father in this ever moving FLOW of power and of love.

It is that same FLOW that Jesus says will include us, who receive the Spirit. We receive and we give.

In the vows that May and Sydney just took, Janet asked them the question (page 34, question #4) ***Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?***

It is when we stand in the FLOW that we receive the power to do these things. We do not have to do them on our own. The more we receive, the more we give, the more we receive.

This is the River of Living Water that the Holy Spirit puts into our hearts, if we will accept it.

It's easy to think of the BIG BANG / FLASH of Pentecost. But Pentecost is really about the little events, the little flows of the power in and through our lives – that sometimes we simply do not realize in the moment how big they are.

As the great Benedictine nun Joan Chittister reminds me, the New York Times equivalent of sixth-century Rome never carried the headline ***BENEDICT WRITES RULE!***

Benedict of Nursia had a quiet idea: to create a livable rhythm of life that could bring together both hermits—the familiar monastic model of that time—and people joining from the world, and replace the

inconsistencies of scattered, competing religious authorities. It did not go that well at first. An early community that called him as their leader tried to poison him. In his lifetime, he started twelve monasteries, each with only twelve men. But he set something in motion that gathered heft over the long arc of history. Benedict could not know in his lifetime, nor could anyone else near or far, that he was fashioning a crucible of resilience that a thousand years later would literally keep Western civilization alive.¹

When the Worship Committee discussed this passage several weeks ago, the question was asked: ***Do you know someone who has rivers of living water flowing out of their heart?*** Immediately one of our members said: ***It makes me think of Eva Jones. She was so full of it that she could not contain it. Nor did it run out. It was constantly replenished.***

Just a couple of weeks ago, I was privileged to preach at the Memorial Service of Judy Pennington. She too, I am certain, could be described in the same way: ***She was so full of it that she could not contain it. Nor did it run out. It was constantly replenished.***

Saint Benedict went on to become famous, although at the time, when he wrote his little *Rule*, it was not a big news item. Saints Eva and Judy are not quite so famous, as Benedict became, but it was in the little everyday ways that they lived, with the power of living water, putting them into THE FLOW, that their lives touched so many people.

You don't have to be famous, to be IN THE FLOW.

Indeed, it is my experience that many FAMOUS PEOPLE are too full of themselves to make way for THE FLOW. And many of the people IN THE FLOW are not persons of high office at all. (There are exceptions, of course. The Bible is full of people whose names are very well known. It is also full of people whose witness is memorialized, but not their name.)

Today, we celebrate Sydney and Mary's joining the Church – a BIRTHDAY for them. But we also celebrated their acceptance of living a life that is INTENDED to be one LIVED IN THE FLOW.

And, we remember our own calling, as well.

- May this River of Living Water FLOW INTO and THROUGH you, as you pass along the path of life in the Kingdom of Heaven at hand.
- Don't worry about the splash you will make. God is the one making the splash.
- Don't worry about being too tired. God always replaces what flows through you. God never calls you to anything for which God does not also empower you.
- May your prayer life keep you in the FLOW.
- May your willingness keep you within the *freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves*

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

AMEN.

ⁱ *Becoming Wise-An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living*, by Krista Tippett, (New York: Penguin Books, 2016) pp. 235-36