



“Disrupt... Shatter... Empower”

Rev. Dr. Martin Hall – Preaching

Acts 9: 1-20; Acts 2: 1-12

May 24, 2026

I am convinced that the Holy Spirit remains one of those more difficult notions of God with which we struggle in life. We can wrap our minds, at least somewhat, around that concept of the creator/parent God whose love enfolds us all. We can look at the Biblical narrative and see the stories of Jesus that give us a reasonable insight into his personage and teachings. The Spirit, however, remains a far more ubiquitous concept. We don't know quite what to make of it, what to do with it, and how to frame it in our lives today. I would bet that, if I were to ask for a basic description of each person in the trinity from those of us gathered today, the Spirit would be the sticking point for most. And I get it. There is plenty of Biblical ambiguity to the nature of the Holy Spirit, and much of what is often attributed to the Spirit in the Bible (speaking in tongues, healings by the disciples, that sudden teleportation of Philip) aren't something we experience in our 21st century day-to-day lives.

So, on this Pentecost Sunday that draws our attention back to that somewhat ethereal concept of the Holy Spirit, I want to start by offering my personal elevator pitch on what the Spirit is. In short – I look at the Spirit as God's active presence in the world in which we live. When we pray for God's healing and guidance – we are praying that the Spirit would be at work. When we pray for peace and wisdom – we are praying that the Spirit would be at work. When we pray that God might in some way be an active part of our lives, or the lives of others, we are praying that the Spirit would be at work. Admittedly, it is a very simplified (arguably oversimplified) definition, but it works for me. When we ask God to get involved, we are asking that the Spirit might be at work. There is in that request for the workings of the Spirit, however, some apt application of that old adage, 'be careful what you wish for!' And that's really what I want to talk about today.

Now, before we go further, allow me to name the fundamental premise from which I am working in this. Namely that, among other many other things, there are three particular aspects of the human condition that can quickly run head-on into the work of the Spirit in our lives. While the extent is different for each of us, I think it is fair to say that, for most of us... 1) We appreciate the status quo. 2) We appreciate predictability. And, 3) We appreciate those comfort zones in which we live most of our lives! We like to sit in what is, know what's coming, and keep it all within a certain bubble of familiarity that makes everything a bit easier to manage in life. The problem, however, is that it seems that the very nature of the Spirit is to disrupt that status quo,

shatter those expectations and send us on an entirely new course we may have never envisioned before.

Consider, if you will, that event that we read about in Acts 2. The author paints this scene of these followers of Jesus gathered in a home for the Jewish festival of Pentecost just weeks after the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Suddenly, there is this penetrating sound that fills the room and some fiery image starts engulfing the space. It's a hard scene to imagine. I almost have to look at it through the lens of a Hollywood camera in order to sufficiently suspend enough disbelief to try to take in the nature of the moment. You'd think it's more a film adaptation of some classic Steven King novel than it is a Biblical story, but I need to let me mind go to that theatrical realm if I am to try to imagine the impact of the moment. As simply as the author portrays the event, and as much as we in retrospect glorify the event, the truth is that the people in that space were stunned, overwhelmed, and likely terrified by what was happening. To say that their status quo was disrupted is an understatement to say the least. I'm not sure that shattered expectations comes anywhere close to the true nature of what took place. And, sure enough, the next thing we know these people are all empowered to speak in new languages they've never before known in ways that the others in the room can understand with clarity that which is being spoken. Disrupted... Shattered... Empowered...

Look, for a moment, at that conversion of Saul of which we read in Acts 9. Saul's status quo, expectations, and comfort zone were not exactly attuned to what God had begun in and through the life of Jesus. In fact, it was everything but. Paul was zealous in his desire to tamp out this igniting flame of the followers of Jesus, and he takes it upon himself to travel the region to seek out anyone who might be causing such problems. Suddenly, Paul is figuratively smacked upside the head, his travel is immediately ceased as he falls to the ground, he hears the voice of Jesus challenging everything he had known and believed, and the next thing he knows he is rendered blind, up and until that moment that Ananias heals him and he is suddenly empowered to use his zealous spirit in an entirely new way. Disrupted... Shattered... Empowered...

Meanwhile, as this goes along, we have Ananias in Damascus, steadily plotting his faithful and dutiful course when God bursts in, sends Ananias to a place and with a purpose Ananias can't fathom, only to be empowered to bring healing and a new beginning to Paul and, arguably, a new beginning to the place of the Gospel in this world as we know it. Disrupted... Shattered... Empowered...

Finally, while this is not printed in the worship order today, allow me to bring us to that story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch that I mentioned at the outset of this message today. The 8th chapter of the book of Acts has Philip preaching in Samaria and drawing all sorts of hearts and minds to the Gospel. Verse 6 tells us that, "*The crowds with one accord listened eagerly to what was said by Philip, hearing and seeing the signs that he did, ⁷for unclean spirits, crying with loud shrieks, came out of many who were possessed, and many others who were paralyzed or lame were cured. ⁸So there was great joy in that city.*" (Acts 8:6) All is going well for Philip in Samaria, and then Acts tells us starting in verse 26 of chapter 8...

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) ²⁷

The disruption has already begun!

So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship²⁸ and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah.²⁹ Then the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over to this chariot and join it.”

The disruption continues!

³⁰ So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?”³¹ He replied, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.

Not all that severe, yet, but expectations are starting to shatter as this lofty member of the court of the Ethiopian queen is inquiring of this stranger who suddenly appeared on the side of the road.

³² Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this: “Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb silent before its shearer, so he does not open his mouth.³³ In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who can describe his generation? For his life is taken away from the earth.”

³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?”

Slowly, Philip is empowered to share the Gospel in meaningful ways with his newfound friend.

³⁵ Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus.³⁶ As they were going along the road, they came to some water, and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?”

More expectations shattered!

³⁸ He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him.³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away;

Now we're really shattering expectations as Philip is seemingly teleported to an entirely different location.

...the eunuch saw him no more and went on his way rejoicing.⁴⁰ But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

Disrupted... Shattered... Empowered...

Now, as we make our way through all these stories, and so many others that we could explore in the Bible, there is an ever-changing choice of language for the divine actor within each moment. Sometimes it is portrayed as a voice. Sometimes as an angel. Sometimes as a light or a vision. Sometimes it's named as the Spirit. Going back to my early definition of the Spirit as God's active work within this world, I argue it all falls under that banner. Each of these are moments of God being active in this world, which I consider to be the work of the Holy Spirit. Each of them, however, and so many others, follow that same pattern of disrupting the status quo, shattering expectations, and empowering the children of God to follow a new path, in new ways, with new faith.

Day after day, week after week, time and again, we lean our hearts and minds into prayers that implore God to be active in this world. To heal. To guide. To comfort. To strengthen. To inspire. I could go on and on. In just a matter of a few minutes we will open up the dialog in this room as we share with one another, and God, those very requests. Some are for us. Some are for our loved ones. Some are for our families, our communities, and this world in which we live. In just a matter of moments we will ask God to be active in those things – we will pray for the work and presence of the Holy Spirit in us, in those around us, and in this world. With those prayers, however, comes that cautionary tale that one ought to be careful what they wish for. Because, 1) we appreciate the status quo. 2) We appreciate predictability. And, 3) We appreciate those comfort zones in which we live most of our lives! So often, however, the Spirit comes to disrupt that status quo, shatter those expectations, and empower a new vision and understanding of the lives that we lead. And when we pray for the Spirit to be at work, whether we realize or not, we are praying to be disrupted, shattered and empowered in faith.