

The Spirit Bearing Witness  
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**Acts 2:1-21**

<sup>1</sup>When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup>And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup>Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup>All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. <sup>5</sup> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?’ <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine.’

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> “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 old men shall dream dreams.

<sup>18</sup> Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.

<sup>19</sup> And I will show portents in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

<sup>20</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,

before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

<sup>21</sup> Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

**Romans 8:14-17**

<sup>14</sup>For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. <sup>15</sup>For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ <sup>16</sup>it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God, <sup>17</sup>and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ—if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him.

Today, the Spirit is bearing witness to God’s deeds of power through me. This story begins with the wife of my friend who is the senior pastor of the church where I worked before coming here.

Wednesday night of this past week, Amanda, a woman in her late thirties, mother of two young children, and a dancer, had a massive heart trauma, causing her to stop breathing and requiring her to be resuscitated, placed on life-support, and into a medically-induced coma. That's where this story begins. The word went out via Facebook and through a newly created CaringBridge account, a quick way to update many people about someone's progress online.

But the story I'm telling isn't about Amanda. On the CaringBridge account, people can read updates and they can also post comments. People from Atlanta, New York, South Carolina, California, Washington, Vancouver and between and beyond came together virtually and made comments, a bit like those from Parthia and Mesopotamia and Asia and Egypt and Rome coming together. Urged by her husband David's initial plea for our prayers, so many of the notes **were** prayers, some quoting Scripture or hymns, many ascribing great power to our God. "Our God is the Great Physician and I pray that he will pour renewed, restorative life into Amanda's body. Amen." "Our prayers that you and your family may experience the nearness and strength of God in these times." "We also pray that God will give you God's strength and help at this most difficult time."

And then there was this comment that caught my attention: "I don't think I have ever said I would pray for someone. I usually send 'thoughts' or 'meditations.' Now I am praying, and hard..." We all knew what we wanted but, above that, above our very specific prayers for Amanda, we called upon God's greatness to be present in whatever outcome. "I pray that our Lord gives you strength and courage as we lean on him even more at this time." If we weren't speaking directly about God's power, we were identifying the great gifts that God has given Amanda, including the gift of her life, all ascribed to God. Just like the visitors to Jerusalem, in our languages we heard each other speaking about God's deeds of power. There were many different types of expressions but we all understood. The Spirit was bearing witness through us all.

We read this morning, "When we cry, 'Abba! Father!' it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God..." Many voices cried, "Abba! Father!" Why? Many were already praying folk but even the person who usually offered thoughts and meditations came in prayer. The Spirit has given us the urge to come closer to God, the urge to be used to bring glory to God. "O Lord...may your powerful love bring healing and hope and help each step of the way. In Jesus' name, AMEN." "I have stood in the shoes you now stand in, and I know how uncomfortable they are. There is nothing else to do but to rest on the Goodness and Grace of God and in the strength you get from the prayer and presence of others."

Now, I suspect you want to know what happened after Wednesday night. From David's CaringBridge journal entry Friday night:

Gifts happen, too. Tonight about 6:00, Amanda was removed from medicine, and within 15 minutes, she was none too thrilled to be hooked up to a bunch of tubes! That, friends, is what we were waiting for, the return of that great spirit we grew to yearn for. This blessing happened tonight, we got our Amanda back! Aced every neuro test. Now resting.

What does that all mean? Does the Spirit pick and choose? As pastors we have the privilege of a large network of colleagues, not to mention the numbers of people we come into contact with in our congregations, and sometimes even your extended networks of family and friends. There were literally hundreds of comments on prayers, and that only accounts for those who wished to access CaringBridge or could. So did God favor the massive outpouring of prayer? I don't believe that's how it works – that would mean God would play favorites and God's favorites would be the “popular” people. That's not the God of whom Jesus speaks. I believe Amanda's body was healthy enough to come back.

Then how did the Spirit bear witness? Would it be any different if Amanda's outcome was not positive? I believe the Spirit was bearing witness throughout, because in it all, there were just a lot of people attuned to the Spirit's nudging them closer to God. That wouldn't be different. Even in lament, to which we pastors are just as vulnerable, the Spirit is nudging us closer. In these past days, the Spirit bore witness to God's deeds of power through the big group of people attuned to the Spirit's nudging. Like I said, this story isn't about Amanda. Around her, God's sons and daughters prophesied, and young men had visions and old men dreamed dreams. “I'm picturing Amanda singing, dancing and moving beautifully once again as she experiences God's spirit and energy.” “As I read the update a beautiful butterfly flew by me and I take it as a sign of life and light!”

This is how the Spirit bore witness to and through **me** this week. My prayer life became more fervent and, most importantly, I have been trying to say as many prayers of thanksgiving as I said prayers for more time for Amanda and prayers for a safe return from induced sleep. And I was reminded how it feels to be attuned to the Spirit's nudging me closer to God. I recognized in myself praying without ceasing, for every time I thought of Amanda or David, I said a prayer. Have you been there? Has life given you a reason to give yourself up to the Spirit? Has there been a time where you were so attuned to the Spirit's drawing you closer to God?

Today we celebrate in the life of the church the openness of the disciples to the nudging of the Spirit. Because they allowed the Spirit to work in and through them, they began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Because they allowed the Spirit to work in and through them, they prophesied and had visions and dreamed dreams. Because they allowed the Spirit to work in and

through them, the church was born. I know the Spirit can and does bear witness through us even in this day. What will happen when **you** allow the Spirit to work in and through you?

Let us pray: Spirit, we open ourselves to you. Bear witness through us, we pray. Amen.