

OK, get ready because today's message isn't going to be about tongues of fire dancing on top of the heads of the faithful. It's not going to be about people speaking in many languages and understanding one another – or the fact that God's message crackled back and forth like lightning between them – or that all were so amazed, their lives were transformed forever after such an experience.

I'm also not going to talk about a parched desert and a pile of sun-baked, dried up old bones of a whole nation of Israel, shaking off the dust and suddenly gluing themselves together because a crazy-man prophet named Ezekiel witnessed God's word to them and woke them up. Nor will I point out that they developed sinew and skin, and after receiving God's Breath - became alive again.

These are just the supporting stories of a much greater reason to acknowledge the birth of our faith, the day we call Pentecost. This day, we honor and celebrate the swirling, sneaky, tenacious and powerful entity we call The Spirit, because Pentecost is really all about the Spirit of God.

The Spirit has many incarnations. With the power of God pushing it forward, it can transform itself into whatever is needed for the circumstance – and bring someone to God's Grace in an instant.

The Spirit digs deep. With the tiniest, sharpest drill, it bores through the toughest crust of denial to the one, hidden place in our souls where it can place a seed of hope.

The Spirit creates. With a magical brush, it paints nature in such a way that we can no longer avoid acknowledging the

greater Being – a benevolent Artist - who provides such a show.

The Spirit listens. With the patience of the most skilled psychologist, it hears the cries of betrayed and betrayer – makes no judgment of either - and softens aching guilt, offering God’s peace to replace the pain.

The Spirit challenges. With the determination of a trophy-winning coach, it stands on the sidelines and encourages us to ask difficult questions, or wrestle with new ways of seeing and knowing God. Then it pumps us up with renewed vigor to get out there and “win one for the Gipper!”

The Spirit teases. With featherweight whispers, it offers hope and peace in times of trial or distress; it pops in and out of empty or defeated lives, and forces souls to wonder about - and look for - the possibility of God in the world.

The Spirit laughs. With a sense of humor worthy of a stand-up comic, it causes crazy, unexpected interactions between unlikely allies, and displays God’s sense of humor through happy coincidences and outrageous opportunities to share joy with others.

The Spirit obeys. With the humility of a trusted, lifelong servant, it follows through God’s bidding to seek out the lowly, the lonely, the haughty and the ashamed – and guides each of us to the Light and the Hope only God can provide.

The Spirit reminds. With nagging thoughts and memories of our faith stuffed in our brains, it tells us who we are and why we need God, especially when we think we want to venture into the dangerous and vulnerable territory of forgetting.

The Spirit insists. With power like a mighty wind or the sigh of a sleeping baby, it swirls inside and out, and surrounds rootless hearts, grabbing - holding on tightly, fiercely – drawing strength from its own inborn faith – it Velcro's God's love to our lives.

The “Spirit of Everywhere and All Things” is all of the above and so much more, and I am humbled and amazed at how something like God's Spirit continues to impact any time, any place, any being it chooses to invade. Nothing is safe – no place is impenetrable – from a Spirit that is determined to serve as God's ambassador in situations where it shouldn't be possible for God to even make a mark. God's Spirit glows with potential of who and what we can be, if we let it in.

We've all heard stories of how God's Spirit has touched people. Some of these stories tell like made-for-TV movies and occasionally they sound so surreal, we have a hard time believing them. Well-meaning people attribute the wrong kinds of incidents to an intervention of the Spirit:

An underdog football team wins the Super Bowl – the quarterback thanks the Holy Spirit...

Six babies are born at the same time – a stunned mother thanks the Holy Spirit...

A trucker lifts a car off of a middle-aged woman at an accident – both credit the Holy Spirit with providing what they needed. These are amazing tales, but did God's Spirit truly step in and bring with it supernatural powers or acts?

It's possible the Spirit interceded in any of these examples, but I'm inclined to think that the Spirit is more likely among

us when we see larger, nobler, intimate change come to the world. I'm aware of the presence of the Spirit when people begin to do God's work quietly and without fanfare; when they open up to alternative ways of living, **working for peace, justice, and tolerance**, accepting one another and letting the Spirit do its work within them so they can do work without, in God's name.

For those of us who believe in God and a Risen Christ, the Spirit is a comfortable old friend, someone to talk to and conjure up in our minds when we need reassurance and guidance. If we've been involved in a faith-life since we were children, the whole idea of "The Father, Son and Holy Spirit" is like a warm, fuzzy blanket that we can easily wrap ourselves in when we feel a little less sure of our belief. To believers like us, the Spirit can also be the armor we throw on when we step out to slay our modern-day dragons – a confidence-builder that ensures we will be true to our belief and maybe even victorious in the name of God. Spirit is woven into all parts of who we are and we depend upon its presence.

But the Spirit's real gifts are put to their greatest use on those who have nothing to believe in – those dead, empty souls moving through life, very much like the dry old bones in the desert, longing to be resurrected, to be whole – waiting for something they don't even know about or understand. They share feelings of not belonging somehow – of frustration because they've hit a wall of some kind – of hopelessness. Or, maybe they are the hard-headed types who need no one and nothing to help them get through life's challenges – who see depending on a God as a weakness or a sign of the inability to stand on your own two feet. Or, it's possible they're the absolute atheists who feel there's no way any "greater power" could create earth, much less the

universe – chance is their god, and no discussion is necessary. These people, these souls, are ripe for that tiny moment when the Spirit can sneak in and leave a thought, or intrude in a micro-second of a dream, or provide a friend who seems different than all other friends – and wondering why, the non-believer takes a first step to opening up to the possibility of God. These instances are where the Spirit truly is God’s “right hand man”...and mysterious connections are made in people’s lives. God is wise to enlist such a helper...

The great part about having the Spirit as our ally is that we really can’t know how or where or in what way it will show itself to us or others. But here’s the most amazing observation I’ve had as I’ve considered how this Pentecostal Spirit works...the tongues of fire, the renewed sinew and flesh, the breath that brought new life...the essence of all these examples of the Spirit we’ve heard about today live in us! We have the power, through our belief and faith, to plant a tiny seed, to listen to the pain, to guide the lost and have a good laugh born of love. With God at the center of our world and the help of the Spirit, we have the power to create inspirational beauty, to encourage and cheer on, to challenge and remind.

We are God’s Spirit – alive with hope and the belief that life in God brings strength, rebirth, joy and more of the same to anyone who allows us to sneak it in and share it with them. Pentecost gives us permission – charges us – with the task of being God for others. You can’t see them, but tongues of flames are on top of each one of our heads – as believers, we’ve been given the language of faith that must be shared. And those dried up, brittle pieces of our former selves without God have become healthy, vibrant, fleshed-out bodies that must live as examples of God-life, so others can see it’s possible to be real and have faith.

Pentecost isn't about something that happened to new Christians long ago. It's about what's happening to Christians right now, in our church in Prescott, Arizona. The Spirit lives - feel the fire – stretch those muscles – and let's give our God to the world that needs our version of faith – God is still speaking!

Amen.