

Very Spirit Bearing Witness

Romans 8:12-17

Remembering the Eucharist

I think as Presbyterians we have engaged in some convenient amnesia
We have forgotten about things that touch our innermost souls
We are keen to remember the outward things
But the inward things we are too easy to forget,

We forget the sacrament, the eucharist, the bread,
Which speaks to our inner tangible transformation
Every time I come here, I am so glad to share communion with you

The sacrament changes you
I find this more and more as I go on as a Christian.

I remember a Presbyterian elder friend of mine
In a discussion about how often Presbyterians should have communion
- For many elders bear in mind that there is only one answer to that question
"Four times a year"

But my elder friend asked a Catholic friend about this, and his view "I can barely survive on once a week".

And we need to learn that our ministry is a ministry of Word and Sacrament
Not Word and (quietly) Sacrament

The Spirit

And so it is with the Spirit, which is beloved of Pentecostals and Charismatics,
And certain kinds of Anglicans
And lots of Catholics

I was once at a conference of Irish Catholics and it was wonderful to feel their intimacy, their love of Speaking in Tongues which one conference speaker referred to being like the gargling of a baby.

And their love of my own minister, Ken Newell whom they referred to like a Catholic Priest and kept calling Reverend Ken.

And we too often have worshipped God who is Father, Son and (quietly) Spirit.

But the Spirit is the one inside us, the intimate presence of the Father, the one reminds us, who speaks to Spirit.

It is surprising for us to realise that how often talk of the Spirit is one of inner witness, It the God of consciousness.

Inner soul, consciousness, awareness, deep deep knowing, is one of the principle works of the Spirit in the Christian life.

The Spirit is first of all for Jesus, the one who is present

Let me read you some passages - this is Jesus in John's Gospel

"Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of Living Water",... now he said this about the Spirit which believers in him were to receive. - John 7:18

"I will ask the Father to give you another Advocate
And to be **with** you forever" - John 14:16

Or this is Paul in a remarkably mystical passage in 1 Corinthians - which I often see as a letter which is Paul telling the Corinthians "Stop it, Stop it now, you're all being terrible, stop it", or letter on "love, love, love, love".

But key to this, the very heart of this is the move of the Spirit

"These things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For what human being knows what is truly human except the human spirit that is within? So also no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God."

1 Corinthians 2

And this again from John's gospel

"But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that have said to you."

And I think that this idea of deep knowing, is our way of welcoming the Spirit, because for us the Spirit has too often been about the way of being which is extravagant, loud, extrovert, outlandish, and that is there - but I think here, in Tenandry, let us begin with deep knowing.

For you are a people who have given of yourselves to deep knowing,
The deep, flowing mystical knowing of God.

And we'll come to the powers, and the tongues, and wind and the fire later on,
Because we don't want a tamed Spirit,
But let us begin where Jesus begins, and where I think the Angel of Tenandry begins
In the Spirit of Knowing

And I wonder if that is because your life and your geography is so defined by mountains and rivers, both the height the flow of God,
The idea of being lifted and the idea of being energise with that which is pure and beautiful.

(You did know that you have an Angel don't you - a collective sense of you-ness, which is your gift to the whole Church).

And it is this knowing which we encounter in this beautiful passage from Paul in Romans 8, in which we encounter this life in the Spirit, this deep knowing, which is the power behind all of Paul's life, the life that is truly different which is the power that transforms, which brings our souls into the very being of God.

Now note as well that this passage in Paul, talks not only about the Spirit's presence as one of deep knowing, but also one of deep transformation:

"So then brothers and sisters, we are debtors not to the flesh...."

I want to say something about the flesh - the flesh in the way that Paul is using it here, is the idea of a set of powers, an impulse within us for misdirected escape, for relief from the pain of being human, by trying to escape our finitude, our limits, by honing in on that which is too much.

The flesh is that which eats and then keeps eating
The flesh is that which deceives us into eating on that which is empty
It is a power which is relentless in its drawing us into addictions which numb us.

It is called flesh I think because it is disconnected from God.

It is hard to read this because there are aspects of flesh which we need to pay attention to - Jesus became flesh, and Jesus had a body - and we have destroyed ourselves too often by hating that part of the flesh, the body which is a gift to us - that again is why we need the sacrament, to bring to our body, Jesus' body.

But flesh here is a power, a misdirected craving, and illusion which pursues emptiness, and having caught emptiness weeps with the tragedy of being empty, which chases darkness and mourns with the loss of no longer seeing the light, which seeks the wrong drugs for our wounds and ends up being even more wounded, which craves also false gods, the false gods of religion which tell us that our self-hatred and our servile fears will bring us salvation.

That is the flesh, and it is the exact opposite to Spirit.

"So then brothers and sisters, we are debtors not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh - for if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are Children of God. For you did not receive a Spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a Spirit of adoption. When we cry "Abba! Father!" It is that Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God."

For Paul, this is the great guiding power of this life,
Alongside the guiding story of Jesus, his death resurrection, and he will now bring them together at the end of this passage:

"It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our Spirit that we are children of God, and if children then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ..."

And then here is the surprising part, but also the truthful part which links with Jesus and his death and resurrection

"If in fact we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him."

There are many thoughts here, but it is life of the Spirit, within us - remember the belly of living water - which reminds us, teaches, speaks to our Spirit, which reminds us in new intimacy with God - Abba Father - which also the power that pulls us into the life of Jesus, which is a life of life and also a life of suffering which leads to glory.

Let me tell you two stories of the Spirit, and the life of the Spirit.

We have thought of Paul.

Let us think too of Little Francesco, so called because his wealthy father was a lover of France, and so he was the little Frenchman.

Think too of his generosity, when coming into the presence of God, he gave away so much of his Father's wealth, that when accused of frivolity by his own Father, Pietro Bernadone, but when accused Francis removed all his clothes, and declared himself a Jongleur of Christ...

He inspired many to follow him include Clare Favarone who founded her own order of Nuns, the Poor Clares.

There is a time that she and Francis met, and the chapel near them was full of fire,
There was the time that Francis tamed the wolf of Gubbio
Or the way he invented the nativity scene a Greccio

This was a life in the Spirit, full of wonder, full of virtue, full of this deep knowing
And also of suffering because Francis also had the Stigmata, the wounds of Christ.

Spirit, power, change, giving, gift, suffering.

This is the life of the Spirit,
And to it we come today
In Word and Sacrament
In Spirit and in Truth

AMEN