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Acts 2: 1-12 | Flowing with the Spirit

I am a resurrection person and I am a spirit person.

I am Armenian by ethnicity. My grandparents generation experienced the first genocide of the last century at the hand of the flailing Ottoman Empire. It was 1915. My maternal grandmother was about 20 years of age, married with one child, living in the town of Zeitun, an Armenian village in today's Turkey. Sometime in April massacres and the deportation were launched. Prominent men were arrested, exiled to the wilderness and killed. Then followed the deportation of women, children and the elderly. Forced to leave her village, my grandmother, her child and mother in law joined others on a death march toward south.

On day a Turkish soldier took her to his family home so she can work as a servant. Months passed.One evening she overheard a conversation between the men of the household. It was about an upcoming marriage ceremony. Eavesdropping, she found out, she was to be the bride. Filled with rage and anger she escaped that night. For w while she was alone and was forced to eat grass in order to survive.

Then she came across a group of Armenian refugees and joined them. After some harrowing years, she found herself in an Armenian refugee camp in Aleppo, Syria where an old priest arbitrarily paired the older men and the woman, and married them. So my grandmother Zarouhi married my grandfather Setrag. For years her body was too emaciated to bear children. Eventually she had four.

I share this story not to depress you but to emphasize that it is a story of horrifying bloodshed and suffering, death and loss, violence and carnage. But it is also a story of rebirth and resurrection and new beginning and second chances. A million and a half Armenians died but many still live scattered all over the globe, having begun new lives, in new lands, starting over and again. My grandmother used to say - I know crucifixion in my body. I know resurrection in my body.

This resurrection experience is at the core of my faith. Never tell me that something cannot be done. If life can come out of death, if God can turn things around, then anything is possible.

I am a Spirit person. Soon after humans were created, the gods held an extraordinary meeting among themselves. They had an urgent problem to consider. Human beings must never discover the secret of life, they agreed, but where could they hide the secret so that it remained safely hidden forever?
At the top of the very highest mountains, one suggested early in the discussion. Humans cannot climb that high.
They can't now, they said, but perhaps they will learn to do so in the future.

For this reason too, they rejected the idea of hiding the secret of life in the depths of the ocean. Humans are imaginative creatures, they noted.
So they considered one plan after another without success until, finally one came up with the perfect solution.
Burry the secret of life in their hearts; they will never think to look there! And so they did.

The Holy Spirit is best kept secret in the church. She is the secret of life. Yet the church traditionally has not talked much about the Spirit - why?

How many feasts or holy days do we Christians have? Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. Yet Pentecost is often forgotten, neglected, ignored especially in our formerly mainline churches. Pentecost does not share equal time with Christmas and Easter, the Holy Spirit with Jesus Christ? Why?

Consider that both Christmas and Pentecost celebrate God's coming to earth - God comes in bodily form at Christmas in Jesus. God comes in spirit form at Pentecost in Spirit.And, why is the church always the church of Jesus Christ and not the church of the Holy Spirit, since we celebrate the birth of the church at Pentecost?

Spirit, the feminine side of God, a feminine word in Hebrew, Arabic, and ancient languages, is derived generally from the same root as **breath, wind, air,** which makes spirit central to life, the essence and core of living. Perhaps because of this life-giving ability the Spirit has generally been a feminine word – ruach in Hebrew, ruh in Arabic, rukha in Aramaic. In Greek pneuma is also feminine, as in Latin spirita, yet the Latin Church in its liturgy uses her male counterpart spiritus. So that gives us a clue.

The Spirit has always been considered covert, within, concealed. Always moving, flowing, stirring, inspiring; yet mysterious, fluid and slippery the Spirit is mystery. Hence she is unpredictable, unnamable, unmanageable. She surprises and astonishes us. She is often unexpected, unpredictable, flowing and blowing where she wills.

No wonder people have always found the Holy Spirit to be scary, perplexing. She eludes our rational minds. She awakens us to realities we do not want to acknowledge. She is powerful and dynamic, yet gentle and loving. She is confusing, hence intimidating. She is breath. She is fire. She is dove. She is peace. She is wisdom, Sophia. She is flowing.

Today as we think of wind we perhaps think of the hurricane that left destruction and devastation on its wake. For you see, whatever has the capacity to give life also has the capacity to take it away. No wonder ancient people worshiped those powers - wind, fire, earth, etc…

I suggest that church fathers were scared or puzzled by the Spirit hence remained silent about Her. By doing so they deprived us of the God who lives and flows within us, with whom we are

not only deeply connected but are intimately joined. The church has emphasized God the other, who lives in heaven and not God within who lives within each human heart.

Yet, The Spirit is the breath we breathe. The Spirit is the fire that fuels our energy, is the source of our vitality, is the core of our wisdom and peace… We have been impoverished by her "absence."

By focusing on Jesus and ignoring the Spirit, the Church has usurped our power and encouraged our powerlessness. As a result we humans, yes, even we church people, have not known the God, the Spirit within; have not grown with a faith that empowers and emboldens us, but have been encouraged to remain childishly dependent, hopelessly powerless, and eternally fearful. I am saddened that we people of faith are often afraid and untrusting in the One with whom nothing is impossible. Our faith has remained childish in a God who we think wants our blind faith, our unthinking obedience, and our thoughtless devotion.

It is time to claim this flowing spirit within us, the Spirit who is fluid yet solid, slippery yet enduring, unpredictable yet trustworthy. The word flowing shares its root with the word fluid. The word solid shared its root with the word whole - sol. And in Sanskrit, in ancient times the word used for Highest God was the word Everflowing. God is the Everflowing.

I believe that if the Church is to live, our faith and our theology have to be relevant to the day. In this day when many wonder how they can connect with a God whose abode is in heaven, far removed, who has created a messy world, who is exclusive and chooses some to love and others to hate, who punishes the bad and rewards the good, just does not make sense… In this world more than ever we need to claim the God within, the Spirit who lives in us, and fuels our courage and growth.

Like our church fathers, we too are often scared of the Spirit. Flowing, mysterious, and unruly we wish we can pick an easier path. But the spiritual patins not easy. A few years ago when as the General Minister of the Living Water Association in Ohio NorthEast, I began visiting congregations, I discovered that many of our churches have the 10 commandments posted somewhere in the church building. I stared asking church people why they had the 10 commandments and not the beatitudes - blessed are the poor in spirit for their is the kingdom of heaven/love; Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God….

The church people had no answer. But I already knew the answer - 10 commandments are easy. Most of us can go through life without murdering or stealing. While the **beatitudes are difficult.** The whole chapter of Matthew 5 calls us to do that which is humanly impossible - 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. And following Jesus' words in the same chapter - you have heard that it was said in the law, you shall not murder"; But I say to you, if you insult your sibling and say You fool you will be liable to judgement. Who is able to adhere to that?

The way of the Spirit is not easy, nor is the way of Jesus. The way of Jesus is the way of the Spirit. The way of the law is much easier.

Yet many of us believe that the law can save us. They want to post it everywhere. Others think that the Bible is a law book. Many cling to the law for security and safety because the law is clear, simple, easily defined, precise, and generally not too difficult to follow. But who can say the same about the Flowing Spirit, who blows where she wills? The Spirit who is flowing, Everflowing and Overflowing…

This spirit is the best kept secret in the church for she is our secret power. Most of us, most of the time, forget that have the power to do incredible things, to move mountains, to do what seems impossible. Most of us rarely remember that we are stronger than we think, that we have the power to overcome incredible odds and make it, that we have the courage to be who we are, that we can speak truth to power, walk the journey with love and compassion.

This spirit, this secret, is within us. Don't forget. Look inside.

My prayer is that the couple of years we will journey together we do it in the Spirit, opening our hearts to wherever she will lead us. The Transitional work is also transformational and only then is it spiritual. We have lots of work to do to make the world a place of justice for all. So, let do it together with the Spirit who is Flowing, Everflowing, Overflowing, taking us us on a journey that is mazing, healing, transforming, resurrecting.