

This Sunday's texts:
Numbers 11:24-30
Acts 2:1-21
John 7:37-39

Go with the Flow
Pastor Jim Cords
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The Holy Gospel according to John, the seventh chapter:

On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in Me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them." By this He meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.

The gospel of the Lord. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You for this, Your Church's birthday. We thank You for the life-giving presence of Your Holy Spirit in our life and we ask You to open our hearts and minds to see the work that You were doing in our midst. In Jesus' name. Amen.

I was saying to one family, as they were walking in, "Happy Birthday!" and they were kind of looked at me a little strange. Well, this is the birthday of the Church, right? Pentecost is the birthday of the Church. Yes. Who is the Church? [Congregation says, "We are."] Amen! So happy birthday! We celebrate the life-giving Spirit poured out to start this movement of God, this movement of the children of Jesus Christ to be God's representatives in the world. We are the Church and we live in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

We had this slide show up a way back in our series, *Lifestyle of Grace*. It lifts up this idea as "if we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit from Galatians 5. Today begins a new series for us, *Living in the Spirit's Presence*. It follows the series *Lifestyle of Grace* and *Living in the Power of the Resurrection*. Now we think about, we open our hearts to all the various ramifications of what it means to live in the Spirit's presence in our lives and in our world. We're just going to touch that today a bit and then we're going to continue to move through it over the coming weeks.

Today we look at the idea of "go with the flow." Now if you hear this in a way that I do not intend, you may have some appropriate resistance. I mean "go with the flow" sounds like you know cooperate with society or go wherever the culture's going, go along to get along. That's not what I'm talking about. To tell you the honest truth, sometimes you can hear the phrase "go with the flow" like you might hear the phrase "take a chill pill." Now I've been known in my life to use that phrase, almost always ineffectively, by the way. I'm not sure why I don't

continue to learn. When someone is stirred up, they're impassioned about something, they're kind of upset. The last thing they want to hear you say is "Calm down." I've also been known to make that mistake a few times. It's amazing how, while I am right, it doesn't feel encouraging to the person you're talking to if you say "Calm down." They need to know that you understand why it is they're worked up. They need to know that you can recognize how they see the situation and why it's important to them. What's going on? So just being told to calm down, while it might be a good idea, is a very ineffective thing to say. Gentleman, I'm speaking to you, today. Learn from my mistakes, as if you haven't already made the same mistake many times in your life.

And then the millionaire, if not billionaire rapper, Jay-Z counters that whole idea when he says, "Don't ever go with the flow. Be the flow." There's something about it that has, in fact, some validity. This idea with instead of just going along and seeing what circumstances put before you. Rather, make a way. Be the flow. Set the agenda. Rather than allowing others to influence you, be an influencer. That can be a positive way to think about things but not so much for us at least without coming into a different context.

Jesus says, "Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow within them."¹ Jesus is saying in us, the children of God, in us, the Church, the source of life resides. It's not just that God is present. It's, as we've been looking at in this Easter series, the *power* of God is present in us and through us. So when we recognize that God's promised presence is with us, we're also called to recognize that God is, in fact, at work and He is equipping and empowering us to do what it is that God is calling us to do in the world, or maybe I should say, to do what it is God wants to do in the world - hear me - through you, through us.

A part of what it means to be ambassadors for Christ in the world isn't simply representing God, but representing God in His authority to bring about which is God's agenda for us and for the world in which we live. We are invited to be a part of that. This text goes on to say something more about that living water. It's not just 300 gallons. Man! That must have meant a lot of work! Wonder how long it took her to draw 300 gallons of water for the camels! No idea.²

¹ John 7:38

² During the Children's Message, Shelley Ahn-Wong, taught about how Abraham's servant found Rebecca to be Isaac's wife. They met at a well and she offered to water his 10 camels. Shelley shared that a camel needs 30 gallons, so Rebecca provided his camels with 300 gallons of water. See Genesis 24:1-20

John says something more here and especially relevant to what we're looking at today. He says, "By this Jesus meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were later to receive."³ This living water in us and that flows through us is, in fact, the Holy Spirit. God's Holy Spirit - let me rephrase - the very presence of God in the world flows through His Church to be in our world. God doesn't just work through your hands. God manifests His presence in the world through you. His Spirit literally flows through you. That's an amazing statement.

It's an amazing expression of the very thing that happened on that first Pentecost. God's Spirit moved into the disciples and then flowed through them to all who were gathered there. In Acts 2, we hear these amazing words. When Pentecost happened, the spirit of Jesus told the disciples to wait and, in fact, that's exactly what they did. They were waiting in Jerusalem for the power of the Spirit to come, to launch this movement of the Church and that's what happened. Then we hear these words from the people who were there. "[W]e hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues,"⁴ in our own native languages.

One of the things I am excited about in our relationship with the church in Ethiopia is to maybe get a glimpse of how it is that that church continues to spread the Gospel and build new churches across tribal and language barriers. With over 49 languages and maybe even more dialects across Ethiopia, the church continues to grow and to grow and to grow. How do they do that if they can't even speak the same language? Maybe the Holy Spirit is providing a means by which they can communicate the gospel, maybe with words, maybe with actions, maybe with interpreters. I don't know.

But I do know that very often in my own life, I use an excuse not to talk to people whose language I don't know, as if that's going to prevent God from working. I even said, as a younger person who felt a bit of a draw to the mission field, that I can't do it because God hasn't given me the gift of languages. I'm not good at foreign language study. It's simply the truth. Now can God do something about that? Could God overcome that? Of course, He could. But I thought there's something going on here that God wants me to pay attention to because I can't seem to learn another language very well. Don't look at me like that! A lot of other Americans don't speak a second language – unlike, by the way, our Norwegian relatives who all seem to speak English perfectly fine.

I want us to pay attention to what the presence of the Holy Spirit being poured out upon the church causes to happen. What the Holy Spirit causes is that

³ John 7:39

⁴ Acts 2:11

one group of people is able to communicate to another group of people whose language they don't understand “the wonders of God.” The people who have the Holy Spirit are able to make known to the others who are listening to “the wonders of God.” I want to suggest to you that the greatest wonder of God, while one might argue would be creation, I think the greatest wonder of God is the death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins. The love of God for us while we were yet sinners still baffles my mind and warms my heart.

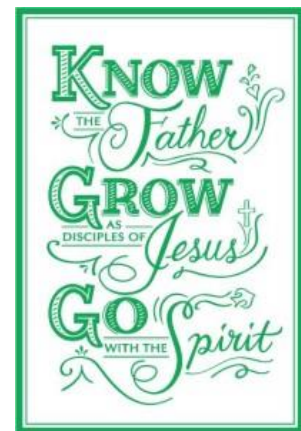
Listen to this that also happened. Let's see how Peter interprets what is happening as these people listen to the wonders of God in their own language. Peter reflects and says “They're not drunk, but, rather, I recall that God said through the prophet Joel in the Old Testament that this very thing would happen. He quotes in Acts the words of Joel from hundreds of years before, preparing the people of God to discern the work of God in their present reality.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, I think this is a model of how the Spirit works. One of the things we're told about the Holy Spirit is what the Holy Spirit will do is remind us of the things Jesus said. God, through his Holy Spirit, will awaken us to the truth that God has communicated through His people in their witness in what we have as the Word of God, the Holy Scripture. The Holy Spirit brings those things to mind to help us discern what God is doing in our world now and in these very moments.

This is been a motto, a model for St Timothy's for a decade, maybe more. This idea that we know the Father, grow as disciples of Jesus, and go with the Spirit. Today we're really looking at that idea of what does it mean to go with the Spirit. Just in case we misunderstand, let's just be sure we understand that the third element of “Go with the Spirit” is not like putting the Spirit in the suitcase and taking it with you, as you head out on a trip. It's not “Hey, don't forget to take the Spirit with you when you go.” It's rather the idea that the Spirit *is* at work in the midst of our lives

We are called not to make the flow, but to see where the Holy Spirit is going and go with the Spirit. Go in our lives where God is going. Do in our lives what God is doing. Cooperate with the movement of God, as we recognize it, through the Scripture and through the promptings of the Spirit and through the voices of the saints, as we see God at work to cooperate with what God is doing.

Some people refer to this as “catching the wave,” experiencing the thrill of being empowered by the Spirit's movement. I know that some of you are a little



unsure of me because of this fact, but I did grow up in Southern California and I did grow up at the beach and I did spend an awful lot of time body surfing. I want to suggest to you that there's one thing you learn about body surfing. When you try to go against the force of the wave, you rarely succeed. You may know where you want to go, but you probably need to go with the flow of the tide in order to be successful.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, the Spirit is at work in the Church and in the world. As we listen, as we hear, as we perceive, as we sense that prompting, we have an opportunity to go with that flow, to cooperate with what God is doing in our lives, around our lives, and through our lives. So we're invited today as God's Church to go with the flow of the Spirit, to seek, to discern, and to even ask God to help us understand. Lord, what is it that You are doing and how can we be a part of it?

So often, we come to this confusion. Often, we would even say and we would be wrong because of our sin, but we would even say "If I knew, I mean if I really understood, if the conviction of God were clear, that I knew what God wanted, I would do it." How many of you want to say Amen to that? We know the truth of our sin often causes us to diverge. The truth of the matter is so often when we say "If I only knew," what we're really saying is "but I can never be sure" and what we're really acknowledging is the struggle in our lives.

How do I discern God's will, God's voice in my life? As John said of the shepherd, the sheep hear His voice and they know Him.⁵ We often respond I'm not so sure. So we laid out for you a few weeks ago on April 21st how we, as a mission team, discern the voice of God in our journey to this partnership we've started in Ethiopia, how God in many different ways affirmed in our hearts and minds that we were, in fact, hearing what He said. A part of that is hearing the stories of the wonders of God. It's looking through the Scripture and seeing how God responds in the world over and over again in the stories of Scripture and our hearing those stories and realizing that that is still true, that God still acts.

It's as we listen to one another talk about what we're seeing in faith. Joe, I really want to thank you for the questionnaire that came for that last Grow Group session. We spent the whole time in our groups talking about how we've seen God at work in the last several weeks. Maybe more than any other time, as we sat together as a Grow Group, individuals talked about the ways that they've seen the power of God working in them in recent weeks. What a powerful witness that is! It's one of the ways we see and hear how God is working and how God is

⁵ John 10:27

prompting us and then to notice, that is, to ask the Holy Spirit to make us aware, so we can see the Hand of God at work, so we can affirm it when we see in the lives of others, so we can be affirmed in it when others see it in our lives, so that we can have the encouragement of the body of Christ to do the work of Christ for the common good, using the gifts of the Spirit the God is given us. We look and we ask God to help us to see the wonders of God that are happening already in and through us. And then, when we see that the truth of that work is in alignment with God's word, we begin to anticipate the wonders of God in the fulfillment of the promises of God in our lives and in our midst, to anticipate, to live with the anticipation that God indeed hears our prayers, that God indeed works in and through us, that God indeed cares about this world, even more than we do, and God has chosen us to be an instrument of God to bless the world in His name. What an amazing thing when we get to that point that we're not only hearing the Word of God but we, in fact, begin to notice that we are the ones declaring the wonders of God, so that others might also see the faithfulness of the God we worship, experience the forgiveness of the God who came and died on a cross, experience the very presence of God in and for them in the promised presence of the Holy Spirit for all who believe. Happy birthday, Church! We live together in the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.