

“Sense of the Spirit”
By Rev. Katrina Pekich-Bundy
Psalm 112.1-10
1 Corinthians 2.1-16
February 5, 2023

This semester I have been leading a group study with students about the Enneagram and Spirituality. If you aren't familiar with the Enneagram, that's ok. All you need to know for this sermon is that it is a tool used to classify one's personality that is used to help you understand yourself, your gifts, your weaknesses, and how you best communicate with others. It is similar to the Meyers-Briggs in that it gives you some basic information about yourself and how you function and perceive the world so that you can grow more and understand one another better.

We are reading a book called *Enneagram Spirituality* by Suzanne Zuercher. The author talks about how exploring the enneagram helps us to shift to different levels of development and deeper understanding of self and others. In one of the first stages we recognize that we are not God. I am sure that we can look around this room and nod our heads and agree, “Absolutely, I am not God! I don't want that responsibility! That's not me!” However, in the world, when we are faced with challenges, when we are faced with messes we feel we need to clean up, we begin grasping for control, we begin gatekeeping, we begin trying to do things ourselves.

The author gives an example using the story of the Sorcerer's Apprentice. I cannot imagine this story without envisioning the Fantasia version, so picture whatever is most familiar to you. If you remember, the Apprentice wants to be like the Sorcerer - which makes complete sense, because he is training under the Sorcerer. His goal is to one day take over the magic and tasks. But, we all know that he needs more training and more time. He decides to give it a try. As he uses more and more magic, he loses more and more control of the situation, until finally he concedes that he needs the Sorcerer's help.¹

Too often we take on the role of the Apprentice, assuming that we can do this on our own; we can just clean up these messes, we can just get control of the situation. I believe the church across the country feels the same way, and usually the sentences begin with “If we just...” If we just could get more young people to come, if we just could start this program, if we just could show people what we're about...then...I find myself as the Apprentice often, as well. In a complicated world that seems heavier every day, we just want a simple solution. Emotionally and mentally and psychologically we seek an easy path, not because we're lazy, but because we've already carried so many burdens. We differ from the Apprentice in that we don't train to be the Sorcerer - we don't want to become God. We aren't learning to take over God's place, but we do forget that and often try to act as God without realizing it.

The 1 Corinthians passage is a letter from Paul who writes about God's wisdom, and not leaning on the wisdom of humans. Paul uses the term “wisdom” and I will interchange the word wisdom and sense. I'm going to use the word “sense” in two ways. First, we'll talk about sense as in common sense or knowledge, and then we'll talk about the sense of the Spirit as something more bodily and experiential.

¹ Suzanne Zuercher, *Enneagram Spirituality*. (Ave Maria Press: Indiana, 1992), 28.

We often pray for leaders to have God's wisdom, that we are able to access the knowledge of God. Part of the second creation story found in Genesis is when Adam and Eve are convinced that they want to be like God, or at least have more knowledge, and they eat from the tree of knowledge. They get exactly what they asked for - more knowledge. But it isn't what they wanted - they find out they're naked, and they gain knowledge and experience of shame. This knowledge has a mental aspect – recognizing the situation with the mind, and an emotional aspect - shame. I think too often we think we can handle the mental knowledge but the emotional knowledge is a heavy lift. God doesn't give up on the humans in the garden. There are consequences, but God still cares.

The knowledge seemed like the easy path - if we know better, we do better - a quote from Maya Angelou. And I agree with this statement. I just think we often times aren't prepared for the emotional knowledge that is unraveled with it. I do think that when we experience that emotional knowledge, uncovering the sadness and pain in the world, we do better, but we cannot take those emotional burdens alone.

For example, in our world, we, as white people, have come to more of an understanding of the harm of white supremacy, the ways in which we have participated in the broken systems, and have perpetuated these systems, even when we don't want to. The mental knowledge is important, and so is the empathic emotional response. The concern is that too often we become frozen when we have that emotional response, and we do nothing.

Not everyone nor every situation leads to doing nothing. We saw during COVID the ways in which people saw needs such as food and water and gas cards and did what they could to help people during the pandemic. Yet, three years after COVID began, we might be feeling tired. People are still hungry. There is plenty of injustice. How do we keep going, continuing to do the work of God in a broken world?

This is where the second concept of sense plays its part. We certainly need the wisdom of the Spirit, but we also need the bodily experience, the sense of feeling, to guide us. I know that with Presbyterians this is dangerous territory. We are intellectual, we are thinkers, and when we talk about the Spirit sometimes, we go, "Wait, it isn't Pentecost yet!" And I hear that. I grew up Presbyterian and went to a Pentecostal Church for youth group in high school - which is a whole other story we don't have time for here. I was uncomfortable, I didn't understand the Spirit led worship, and there was much I disagreed with theologically, but I will say they gave me an appreciation for the Spirit and the embodiment of faith that I wasn't able to access at the Presbyterian Church I attended on Sunday mornings. It was there that I found a connection to movement and dance and Spirit, knowing that sometimes there were words that couldn't express my faith, but movement could.

It is in the times of figuring out how to keep moving that we lean on the Spirit, and know that sometimes there aren't words. Sometimes there aren't ways to express the deep emotional sense we feel in faith, but that we can do so with music, with movement, with a hand on our heart, or with our tears, or with a hug or a high five. I believe one of the hardest tasks we have is to connect our head and our heart - we either excel at one or the other, but it is difficult to dwell in both simultaneously.

As a Matthew 25 church we have to listen to the Spirit to figure out how we do both. How do we create systemic change? How do we take a risk and say, “I don’t understand the path ahead, but I’m ready to try, to maybe fail, and try again”? We want the simple answers, the “If we just…” but it will take more. It takes wonder and questions and asking where we are called in the midst of it.

I began this year talking about wonder – and I keep coming across readings that also talk about wonder, and I think there is power in that creativity of seeing the world through a different perspective. When we feel that emotional knowledge and feel frozen, we can lean into wonder. Author Cole Arthur Riley says: “Practicing wonder is a powerful tool against despair”² and “...wonder doesn’t dismiss pain; it brings us out of numbness.”³

Our faith is full of memory. When we gather at the table we remember all the stories of faith that sustain us. This is a sense of spirit in our memory, who reminds us God has done this thing in the past and God will do it again. I liken faith memory to muscle memory. I can’t do all the dance moves I once did when I was younger, but when asked to do a tendu or a plié, my muscles know exactly where they need to go - even if they don’t have the capacity to do it as fully. The Spirit is that muscle memory for us - reminding us when we feel alone, when we feel lost, that we can have hope because God has done great things in the past, and will continue to do great things in the future.

May you be filled with the sense of the Spirit, guided with hope and wonder in a world of brokenness, and filled with the love of the Almighty God. Amen.

² Cole Arthur Riley, *This Here Flesh*. (Convergent: New York, 2022), 37.

³ *Ibid.*, 39.