

“Becoming Pneumatic”  
Acts 1:6-8 & 5:27-32;  
John 14:25-27 & 20:19-23  
Rev. David Hutchinson  
Sunday, March 1, 2020

Lawnchair Larry made a 45 minute flight in 1982.

He did it in a lawn-chair attached to 45 helium filled weather balloons.

The chair reached 15,000 feet.

It floated over the Los Angeles International Airport and eventually got tangled in the power lines as Larry tried to land it by shooting the balloons with a pellet gun. / His flight attracted worldwide attention from the media - - and it inspired people who would come later - - who tried to imitate him. / Anyone remember this?

One of Larry’s imitators was a man from Oregon named Kent. / He flew more than 200 miles in his lawn chair from Bend to North Powder, near the Idaho border. / A year later his second flight landed in Idaho - - achieving his goal of interstate lawn-chair travel.

What most people don’t know is that Larry’s life ended sadly.

After his inspirational flight, he was arrested for violations of the Federal Aviation act, and fined for \$4000. / Later in life he hiked the San Gabriel mountains and volunteered with the U.S Forest service. / But even later - - his life ended in suicide - - at 44 years of age.

When interviewed about the flight he said: “It was something I HAD to do. / I had this dream for 20 years. / If I hadn’t done it I think I would have ended up in the funny farm.”

I have all kinds of mixed emotions - - when I think about Larry and his story.

To me it is amusing - - strange - - courageous - - tragic - - inspirational - - and pointless.

I have mixed emotions when thinking about the Holy Spirit as well.

And something about the story - - of Larry and his balloon ride - - connects for me to my feelings about the Holy Spirit - - in the Bible - - and more specifically with - - how we - - and how I sometimes relate to - - this notion of being “with the Holy Spirit”.

Acts refers to the Holy Spirit MANY more times - - than the gospel of John. / But it's there in both. / In John the Holy Spirit is connected with Jesus' breath - - and is “received” by the earliest followers. / In Acts the first large gathering of followers is described as being “filled with the Holy Spirit”. / Basically just about everything that happens in the New Testament after Jesus dies - - is centered around the Holy Spirit in some way.

And so - - since WE come AFTER the death of Jesus - - and since we are here trying to figure out how to be followers of Jesus - - it's something we have to deal with. / If we want to use the Bible as our guide - - that's where we have to start.

Figuring out how to follow Jesus and how to live - - AFTER Jesus - - involves the Holy Spirit. / And that can lead to - - - all kinds of mixed emotions for some people.

Pentecostals - - are the Holy Spirit people - - we sometimes think.

Holy Spirit people - - do strange things - - we sometimes think.

Maybe the idea of the Holy Spirit is mysterious and hard to understand.

Maybe it's a little frightening and weird.

Maybe people who are filled with the Spirit seem like - -

- - people who are inclined to go off in a lawn-chair attached to helium balloons.

But what I hope to do in the next few weeks - - is convince you otherwise.

And I think it's important because - - the church year after Easter - - REVOLVES around scripture readings - - that grow out of the experience of the Holy Spirit.

In Advent we experience the birth of Jesus and God the Father - - and then in Epiphany God is known in the light of creation and the light of Christ. / In Lent we delve deeply into the story of Jesus struggle and death. / And then for WEEKS and weeks - - we move toward Pentecost Sunday and beyond. / And all these texts grow out of the Holy Spirit - - which is what we have - - AFTER JESUS.

God creates - - and then Jesus lives and dies - - and then the Holy Spirit remains.

So how do we find out about the Holy Spirit?

The book of the Acts - - more than any other - - is the story of the Holy Spirit.

The same person who wrote Luke wrote “the Acts of the Apostles”.

Acts is the Holy Spirit sequel - - to the Gospel of Luke.

In Acts - - it is the action of the Holy Spirit in the Apostles that takes center stage.

So usually Acts is the historical reading for Sundays in the Easter season.

But this year - - I am going to jump AHEAD in preaching.

The Holy Spirit is going to invade the season of Lent.

Over the next five Sundays - - we will make our way through the book of Acts in a chronological way - - beginning to end. / And along the way - - I will refer to the Gospel of John. / John and Acts have DIFFERENT things to say about the Holy Spirit. / And how they are different - - and where they are similar - - will tell us a lot about the Holy Spirit. / We will get a larger picture than we would otherwise have.

And hopefully by the end of these 5 weeks - - you won't feel like people that are filled with the Holy Spirit are - - lawn-chair flying - - helium filled kooks.

Nevertheless - - I started with the image of helium balloons for a reason.

Helium balloons are filled with helium, and the early followers were described as filled with the Holy Spirit. / So it is an image of being filled. / And balloons filled with helium do things differently from other balloons. / They fly!

Followers who are filled with the Holy Spirit - - seem to be different as well.

A pneumatic tool - - is another example. / A pneumatic tool is filled with compressed air - - and can do amazing things. / More than regular tools.

And so helium balloons might be described as - - pneumatic balloons.

The literal definition of the word “pneumatic” is “filled with air”.

But the word “Pneuma” in Greek means MORE than just “AIR”

Pneuma means “breath” and it means “spirit” or “soul” as well.

The Hebrew word for the Spirit is “ruah” and means “breath” also. / That’s probably why - - in John’s gospel - - Jesus talks about BREATHING on the early followers - - as a way of receiving the Holy Spirit. / To receive the Spirit - - is to become PNEUMATIC: To be filled.

But - - hopefully - - followers of Jesus are filled with MORE than just HOT AIR!

And THERE is the problem - - again:

People who are filled with the Holy Spirit are seen as FANATIC.

And what I hope to convince you of is there is a way to see it differently.

If you are afraid of the Holy Spirit - - because you don’t want to be accused of being an:

ERRATIC - - FANATIC - - MELODRAMATIC - - pneumatic...

OR if you think that Presbyterians and other mainline-ers are not really into this Holy Spirit stuff - - and so we are usually seen as:

DIPLOMATIC and SPORADIC pneumatics... or even STATIC!...

Then I hope we can consider the possibility of another option.

Could we embrace the idea of being set FREE to be:

“ACROBATIC PNEUMATICS”?!

An acrobat is a performer who does amazing feats. / An acrobat has good balance and agility. / An acrobat easily changes - - viewpoints - - sees other opinions.

An acrobat - - flies!

But hopefully NOT into power lines or over restricted airports.

Instead - - an ACROBATIC PNEUMATIC - - flies with the Holy Spirit.

But just exactly WHAT does THAT mean?

If you wonder - - or if you aren't sure yet - - that you want this...

...please give me a few more minutes to explain...

In the gospel of John Jesus prepares the first followers to receive the Holy Spirit - - as they face their FIRST major crisis. / Jesus death and departure is that crisis. / Jesus makes a great effort to prepare them in John. / Chapters are devoted to Jesus prayers and instructions about what to do to get ready for life AFTER he leaves. / The Holy Spirit doesn't actually arrive until Pentecost in Acts - - but in John - - Jesus tries to prepare the disciples.

A large part of John is devoted to this idea of life AFTER JESUS.

And Jesus says that he won't leave them alone - - but will send the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is described as a “counselor” or an “advocate”.

Jesus says in John: as the Father was IN me - - I will be IN you.

So according to John - - PNEUMATICS - - are more able to face death.

They are more able to make their way - - and not feel alone.

They are less afraid of being alone.

And they never really ARE alone.

Now - - is any of THAT something you would like?

Well, there's MORE...

In Acts - - the early followers are sent to all sorts of places by the Holy Spirit.

They are described as "witnesses".

People from all over - - of different languages and nations are UNITED.

And the followers are set free of their FEAR of all these OTHERS.

Imagine a world - - where we didn't FEAR people who were different!

Imagine a world - - where people had the courage to cross boundaries and unite!

Now is any of THAT - - something you would like?

Basically what happens when we BECOME PNEUMATIC is that fear goes away.

How do you KNOW when the Spirit is really FILLING you?

Fear subsides...even just for a bit.

The fear of being left alone...

The fear of death and sorrow...

The fear of our wounds and our anxieties...

The fear of bearing witness to what we believe...

The fear of people different from us....

And these early followers - - experienced that.

The book of the Acts of the Apostles - - is NOTHING if not a testimony to people who lived life - - unafraid - - and with courage. / Where did they get it?

According to the Biblical accounts - - by being FILLED with the Holy Spirit.

AND - - it all started - - when they WERE afraid!

They were huddled and afraid...

They were facing the crisis of life AFTER JESUS.

They were no MORE courageous than you or I are now.

But THEN they received ONE thing that changed it all: The Holy Spirit.

Leonard Sweet describes followers who live according to the Holy Spirit as:

“pneumanauts” / Like astronauts - - who are sailors of the skies and of space...

Pneumanauts are sailors of the SPIRIT.

He encourages followers to live a “wind blown life”.

I love his image - - BUT - - there is a caution too - - be careful not to simplify this.

This is NOT just - - about opening yourself up to adventure.

The WIND of the SPIRIT - - is something you RECEIVE and TAKE IN.

According to the Bible followers are FILLED with it.

So unlike Sweet's image of a sailor and a sail...

I chose a balloon - - which is FILLED - - inside out.

Another misconception is that the Holy Spirit is like the FORCE in Star Wars.

There's even a website called “the Christian Jedi” devoted to pointing out the DIFFERENCES between the FORCE in the “Star Wars” movie and the Holy Spirit.

First of all - - the Holy Spirit isn't an IT - - the Holy Spirit is a person.

The Spirit of the living Christ.

Secondly whereas the FORCE is made up of all living things - - the Holy Spirit is eternal.

Third the force can be manipulated - - but the Holy Spirit DWELLS WITHIN believers and believers can NOT control the Spirit - - rather the Holy Spirit - - guides and prompts believers.

And finally - - there is no DARK SIDE - - to the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is pure and holy.

The Holy Spirit DRAWS us into DEEPER community...

Community with others... And community with God...

Community where fearlessness - - takes root.

In the book we read in February on Monday nights - - "Tattoos on the Heart" - - a man named Father Boyle - - has attempted to create a similar community in Los Angeles. / In the midst of one of the hearts of GANG activity - - Boyle has created a community of the Heart. / The book tells the story of this priest - - who walks along side gang members as they create another way to live.

At the heart of their new community is KINSHIP.

They create a new family for one another. / New KIN. / A place to belong.

And living in this community of kinship doesn't mean that everything is all OK.

There are still struggles and there are still funerals.

But at one of the funerals Boyle said this about the gang member who had died.

Even though he died by being shot... He had turned his life over to another way.

He had come to know the TRUTH about himself.

And that truth was: he was clothed in God's goodness.

And he embraced this goodness - - and nothing was the same again.

Or as Boyle puts it: "When the vastness of God - - meets the restriction of our own humanity...words can't hold it."

One way that happens - - is by the Holy Spirit. / We open ourselves.

We become Pneumatic. / Fear subsides. / And we fly.