

FREE FLOWING

The title suggests unhindered movement; something that is **not** static, not solid and immobile, and not controlled.

This season's "run off" comes to mind.

There was lots of water flowing,...over fields and roads, and into houses, and even through basement walls.

Many are still struggling to confine the flooding.

Water wants to flow; water and air are at their best when they are moving / flowing.

A river, if left alone, will purify itself after flowing for 12 miles.

Confined/ restrained / trapped water or air becomes.... not so wonderful and pure.

Even so, we humans go out of our way to control water.... because water is so powerful..... and essential for life.

Sometimes our manipulation is beneficial, such as indoor plumbing.

This past week I was reminded about water's flowing ability. I tried to be a plumber, but instead "freed" the water..... which flowed through the ceiling down onto the floor below. I called Russ, and now the water is staying in the pipes.

Water is essential for life. Population density is determined by the availability of water, and because it is so precious, we strive to own it / possess it. Dams, aqueducts and fortresses have been built in the pursuit of controlling and possessing water.

We humans are interesting... and fearful creatures.

We discover a free gift, such as water that rains down from the clouds, or oil or potash in the ground, or trees that freely grow,... and we claim it as our own / we control it and limit it,..... and then wonder what happened to the natural balance and abundance in life.????

Water has become a controlled commodity—where abundance and purity has become the exception.

This may be the case too with God's illusive, expensive Spirit.

Once there was a time when God's Spirit was a gift that flowed freely.

Genesis 1:30 states that all creation received the "breath of life."

God's breath of life was freely given to humans, as revealed also in Genesis 2:7.

The writers of the Torah were able to write with inspiration because of receiving God's breath – Ruach!

Ruach is the Hebrew word for God's breath –denoting God's indwelling and life giving Spirit.

The Old Testament considered God's Spirit to be feminine... because God's Spirit was nurturing, enabling and life giving.

Ruach used to freely touch / affect people, lots of people.

The Numbers passage is an example where God's Spirit "rested" on over 70 on one occasion. Those who received God's Spirit were inspired—they gained new passion / new insight for life.

Two men, separate from the others, also received God's Spirit and demonstrated their new found abilities.

One young man didn't think that was right—that they should also freely receive Ruach, so he ran and told Moses about it.

Moses criticised the young man's arrogant attitude, and stated that it would be wonderful if ALL the people had God's Spirit in them.

This is a clear declaration supporting free and open access to the breath of God – the breath of life.

Moreover, there are numerous other examples in the Old Testament about God's Spirit / God's breath flowing freely to large groups of people.

At times, as written in First and Second Samuel, there was mass giddy excitement – impassioned energy after receiving the Spirit of God, which included unabashed dancing.

Ruach was a blessing / a gift for all to receive.

The prophets gained their inspiration and passion from the Spirit, and wrote about the enabling and life giving power that came from God's breath.

Ezekiel described the potential of an entire nation of "dry bones" coming to life from God's Spirit.

Ruach – God's breath – the Spirit of God not only grants a deeper / purer connection with God, but it also gives life, inspiration, new gifts and insights,... and a purpose for unity, and... Ruach is freely given to those who will receive it.

In a way,... it is a great human equalizer – all in creation / all empowered by God and in union with God.

Unfortunately,.....Mass empowerment can make most rulers/ most leaders a bit nervous... because it threatens their grip on power.

Corrupt rulers control things, including people.

Moreover, how can something be special if it is free.

We are taught that special things are rare, exclusive and expensive.

So, just like water,... something so wonderful and free was restricted and controlled..... by persuasion.

People were taught that availability and access was difficult and limited.

Even though God's Spirit was offered to all, the early Christians claimed it has their own. Just as the church absorbed / assimilated the pagan holiday of Winter-festival, altered it some and called it Christmas, the early Christians claimed Pentecost has their own, and made the gift of God's Spirit exclusive to themselves, too.

Pentecost no longer has its traditional meaning for us. We completely associate Pentecost to the time the waiting apostles of Jesus received the Holy Spirit. The rewriting is that complete, as are the other innuendoes.

The Jewish holiday of Pentecost was the second of the three great festivals. The first was Passover, and the third was Festival of the tents, sometimes call tabernacles or booths. The Festival of the tents was a time to go out and live in a tent to recall the exodus out of Egypt. Pentecost means 50th day, and was sometimes called Festival of the weeks because it was 7 weeks from Passover—49 days, plus the holiday.

Pentecost was a gathering of people from all around to celebrate the grain harvest. It was a big thanksgiving party.

Like all big celebrations, it was too popular to give up, yet it was Jewish, and that was a problem for the early Christians.

They were in competition with the Jews, at that time.

So, they claimed Pentecost as their own,.....they sought to control it,.... and they also took God's Spirit with them, too. They asserted that Ruach was now only for Christians,..... and the free flow was hindered.

Most of us think nothing of that shift.... because we believe we are special.... that we / only Christians are entitled to Ruach ownership, and thus... we also have come to believe that the special touch of God's Spirit is a rarity.. Or must be earned..... Maybe because it is now so expensive... Strange how that happens to things we control..... they suddenly become scarce.

Nevertheless, as Acts 2 presents, that first century Pentecost was a momentous occasion – when many received God's Spirit.

From God they received inspiration, life giving empowerment... and gifts that grant unity. Others of different cultures and languages were able to understand them. There was unity.

God's Spirit brings life and unity,..... not division and exclusivity.

With the empowered and inspiration of God's Spirit they were able to boldly speak out and reach out. After being filled with God's Spirit, Peter got up and gave the first sermon in the post ascension world.

Creative inspiration, gifts that help others and that build unity and a keen life giving sense of being connected with God and all of creation are characteristics of God's indwelling Spirit... of breathing in Ruach.

It is not merely a emotional occasion. Focussing on the emotional aspect is in essence a claim of ownership,..... and that is counter to the fruits of the Spirit.

So,..... are those days long gone?

Rarely do we hear about large groups or small groups of people receiving God's Spirit. In fact, we hardly ever even talk about it or mention it. I suppose.... because we assume that,... like fresh pure water, God's Spirit rarely comes our way anymore.

Most churches are anaemic / dull / void of passion, unity and creativity.

Individuals are depressed or self absorbed..... or full of fear.

It seems like we are barely living / just getting through each day.

People are dividing into separate camps. It's become us and them, and most of "them" are bad,.... so we need more prisons,.... because we aren't working together.

We are vapid – missing out on life giving vitality and inspiration.

We are lacking vision and passion, and the willingness to risk something big for something good.

Life has become thirst next to a rusty, broken faucet or waiting by a dry riverbed.

So, we cling to our conditioning and customs, and conclude that God's Spirit no longer freely flows..... and that it is so expensive that we need to have more faith to earn it.

And,..... that just doesn't make sense, and it is not what the Bible teaches. And, why would God hold God's breath from us?

Freely – without payment God gave Ruach to Adam ... to all of creation.

God's spirit of life seeks to flow out to open areas / to those willing to receive.

God's Spirit touched the writers, the prophets, large groups of people, and the early Christians.

We call that breath of life the Holy Spirit,.... we could call it God's breath / Ruach.... or the Spirit of life... or even the muse.

God's Spirit rested on those in the Numbers text.

Inspired Mozart, Beethoven, Monet and all the artists... because they were open.

No doubt Menno Simons and countless others deeply inhaled God's breath,.....

And, to all who move away from the self constructed barricades and walls,... and open up to God's call to be touched / to be loved.... God's Spirit freely flows.

We must let go of our need to control God / to own God / to limit God in order to discover how freely God's Spirit is imbued in all of creation and can come to us.

If we pause and spiritually breathe deeply...

If we look for God and invite God....

If we allow ourselves to be loved.....

If we listen.....

If we open up.... we may hear... **like a drum beat**.. ... that God's Spirit is alive and well.....and abundant for all to receive.

{one drum is heard, then another, and another..... the piano starts... we singing "Rain down"..... keyboard jumps in on second verse..... We transition to "Spirit of the living God"....drums continue, picking up the beat.... we sing "Asiti".

Our medley of songs was not to fabricate or to simulate the indwelling of God's Spirit.

It was intended to be an invitation to come out and open up.... to declare to God..... I'm here and I'm ready.....

Singing can be a celebration..... and a from the heart invitation.

We sing together,...hopefully in harmony..... and we never knew where it will take us.

That sort of risky openness.....is just the invitation we need.

[benediction]