

Acts 19:1-7 N.T. 130 (NRSV)

¹While Apollos was in Corinth, Paul passed through the interior regions and came to Ephesus, where he found some disciples. ²He said to them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” They replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.” ³Then he said, “Into what then were you baptized?” They answered, “Into John’s baptism.” ⁴Paul said, “John baptized with the baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus.” ⁵On hearing this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. ⁶When Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied—⁷altogether there were about twelve of them.



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“Spirited Living”

Opening Prayer: Let’s prayer. Heavenly Father, we come to you today from a world in turmoil. Many people are living in fear. Hold us close and pour your Word of Life into our weary souls today. In Jesus’ Name we pray, **Amen.**

Introduction: It’s amazing how a great picture can tell a story. This is Wentzie. You probably didn’t notice that he’s sleeping in a suitcase. I took this picture in Haiti. His family couldn’t afford a crib, so they made do with a suitcase. When I’m preparing a message, I often spend hours looking for a few great pictures to help me illustrate the message. When I find the right picture, I know it will help you all hear what God has to say to us today.

This picture of a dad twirling his son is the one that instantly caught my imagination. A great picture really is worth every one of a thousand words. Here’s a father and son fully engaged in living. In this instant, there’re no regrets over the past and no worries for the future. All by itself, this picture tells a story of ***“Spirited Living”*** more completely than the few thousand words I’ll say during this message today. That’s how powerful a great picture can be.

Now I want to show you another picture that also caught my imagination. This is a picture of a father and son in a refugee camp in Kabul, Afghanistan. They’re cold, they’re dirty, they’re hungry, but they haven’t given up on life yet. They’re still hoping for a tomorrow that will be better than today. You can see it in the longing in their eyes as they stare at you, cheek to cheek. This picture tells a story of ***“Spirited Living”*** too. In fact, this picture might even come closer to telling the story of ***“Spirited Living”*** that I feel God is longing to tell us in this message today. Life does have its adversity, but even that adversity is bearable when a father and child are facing life together.

PAUSE

Move I.

Many people are trying to face life without their Father. They're the captain of their own ship. They're the master of their own fate. They're the savior of their own soul. They're self-reliant. Every parent raises their children hoping that one day they'll be independent. But no parent wants their children to forget them. **Any parent would be heartbroken** if their children didn't ever drop by for a visit or call them on the phone. Parents want their children to stay in touch.

Now we all know that the most powerful analogy used in the Bible to describe our relationship with God is that of a father and his child. **That's why seeing pictures** of a father twirling his son in the air **or shivering together** with his son under a blanket, give us insights into our relationship with our Heavenly Father. But we also all know that every analogy breaks down at some point. There're characteristics of our earthly father and our Heavenly Father that don't match up. For example, our earthly father, being human, can make mistakes while our Heavenly Father, being divine, never makes mistakes. Or our earthly father, being mortal, will die, while our Heavenly Father, being immortal, will never die. **But one place** where the analogy holds up is in a parent's hope that their children will stay in touch.

Now days, we have lots of communication technology. Cell phones and the internet and even Facetime and Zoom allow us to be in instant communication with people who are far away. **My mother lived to be 89**, and in her later years she wasn't to adept with technology, but she could still push the speed dial button on her phone. Now, it'd been nearly 40 years since I've lived with my mother, and most of my adult life she lived a hundred or more miles away, but we both knew that with a touch of a button we could be talking with each other in an instant. But my mother went on to eternity six-years ago, so I we can't just call each other anymore. No analogy is perfect.

Our Bible lesson today is about a group of disciples who weren't keeping in touch with God. **Not only didn't** they have God's number programmed into their phone, **they didn't even know** what a phone was. **Paul encounters** this group of disciples in Ephesus and immediately asked them, **“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?”** (Acts 19:2b). And these disciples very matter-of-factly answer, **“No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit”** (Acts 19:2c). **I can't imagine living** as a Christian without having ever heard of the Holy Spirit, but that's what these believers in Ephesus are doing.

Anytime we baptize someone into the faith, we stress that Baptism isn't just washing with water as a sign of forgiveness of sin, it's also sealing God's claim on a person's life **with the gift of God's Holy Spirit**. Christian Baptism is by water and the Spirit. **But this group of disciples** in Ephesus had only received half-a-baptism. They were water washed **but they weren't reborn by God's Spirit**. It was as if they were trying to go through life without their phones to keep in touch with God. That's a terrible way to try to face life.

I fear that some of you here this morning have only received half-a-baptism too. You've been water washed but you've never been Spirit born. **A survey by the Barna Research Group** found that fully one-half of Baptized Christians have never experienced the reality of God's Holy Spirit. **They're blindly** trudging through life along without keeping in touch with God. **Yes, sadly many people are trying to face life without a connection to their Heavenly Father.**

End I.

Move II.

But God wants us all to be fully alive. God wants us to be whole in both body and soul. Baptism is by water and the Spirit for good reason. God knows that remaining connected to us is vitally important for our wellbeing. We aren't just physical beings; **we're spiritual beings too.** That's the way God made us. That's why God sends the Holy Spirit to come and live with us. The Holy Spirit is a believer's spiritual cell phone for staying connected with God.

Just as the believers in Ephesus were ignorant about the Holy Spirit there and **many believers today** who are ignorant about the Holy Spirit too. To these believers, all this talk about spirituality is just a bunch of hocus-pocus mumbo-jumbo. It's not that they don't believe in God or that they don't have faith in Jesus Christ, they do! It's just that they have a very weak sense of the spiritual realm. If ask if they have a sense of their own spirit, they typically answer, "**I don't know.**" But just because a sense is weak doesn't mean you can't make it stronger. **Everyone has a spiritual sense**, just not everyone recognize that that's what it is. **People speak** of higher consciousness; **or their inner voice**, **or their gut sense**. All of these are ideas that overlap the reality of your spiritual sense.

That sense that leads you to believe that God is real and actually cares about you is your spiritual sense. **The sense** that leads you to trust in Jesus Christ for your salvation is your spiritual sense. **That sense** that tells you that there's more to life than this, is your spiritual sense. Yet as a pastor, I know that many Christians aren't knowingly aware of their spiritual sense. **Many Christians** have no sense of their own spirit let alone being comfortable with God being with them in Spirit.

But our ignorance doesn't change God's reality. God is a spiritual being and part of what it means to be created in God's image is to be created as spiritual beings too. **God enlivens** all of our bodies by instilling in each of us a spirit. **God is spirit**, we are spirit, and we worship God with our spirit. (John 4:24)

Many Christians are fearful of spirituality. When they think of spirituality **they think of séances; they think of and palm readers, or they think of eastern mystics** sitting and contemplating their navels for hours on end. While all of these are dabbling in spirituality, they're also all missing the point. **Spiritually isn't about getting** in touch with ourselves, **it's about** how we get in touch with God. Our relationship with God is a spiritual relationship. Spirituality is the living link between God and us.

To try to live without our connection to God is to be half-dead. Our bodies are breathing and moving while our souls are inwardly wasting away. We're walking around half-dead. The only way we can be fully alive is to live in a place where our souls get to breathe and move too. **That's the place** we find when we live in the holiness of God. **In Acts 17:28 (NRSV)** we read, "**For in God we live and move and have our being.**" Only when our spirits live in connection with God's Spirit can we be fully alive. Sure, many believers are still afraid of and confused by spirituality. **But God really does want all of us to be fully alive.**

End II.

Move III.

So, invite God's Spirit to come and live with you. The gift of the Holy Spirit is freely available to all who place their faith and trust in Jesus Christ. **But the Spirit only** goes where the Spirit's welcomed. **Even though John the Baptizer** had baptized the believers in Ephesus, they hadn't received the Holy Spirit because **no one ever invited** the Spirit into those believers' hearts.

What strikes me about Paul's encounter with the believers at Ephesus is how matter-of-factly he deals with the reality he finds. **Paul doesn't play the blame game.** Paul spends no time worrying about why these believers didn't know anything about the Holy Spirit. Paul doesn't become irate with the leadership of the church in Ephesus for the woefulness of their theological teachings. Paul also doesn't fret about the failure of the evangelist that led these believers to faith for not invoking the Spirit's power on their behalf. **Rather what Paul does** is very matter-of-factly set about rectifying the situation. Paul lays hands on them invites the Holy Spirit into those believers' lives. **Paul completes** the process started by John the Baptizer.

Many pastors and Biblical Scholars aren't quite sure what to make of our Bible lesson today here in Acts 19. Some argue that this passage encourages rebaptism. Others argue that John the Baptizer's baptism wasn't a Christian baptism so this was actually these believers first "Christian" baptism. Then there are other pastors like me who don't pretend to be smart enough to know for sure. All I know is that these Ephesian believers had not yet received the Holy Spirit, but after Paul laid hands on them, they had received the Holy Spirit. Since Christian baptism is by water and the Spirit, **I simply see Paul** finishing what John the Baptizer had started. **Paul adds** what was lacking.

V

V

Paul's response to the situation isn't a theologian's response; it's a pastor's response. Paul isn't concerned about explaining doctrine; he's concerned with empowering fellow believers for ministry. For these believers in Ephesus to be effective followers of Jesus Christ, Paul knows that they need the power of the Holy Spirit. **So, Paul acts** like a good pastor and sets about to help those believers obtain what they lack. Paul uses his authority as an Apostle of Jesus Christ to invoke the Holy Spirit on these believers' behalf.

In June of 2008, when I was ordained as an Elder in The United Methodist Church, an Apostle of Jesus Christ laid hands on me and invoked the Holy Spirit to empower me for my work as a Pastor. That Apostle's name wasn't Paul, it was Tom, and on that day Bishop Thomas Bickerton spoke 23 words that forever altered my life. Listen to those 23 words:

{Play "*Ordination Clip.wmv*" [0:15]}

Receiving the Holy Spirit is not difficult. If you place your full faith and trust in Jesus Christ for your salvation and you're open to receiving God's Spirit, you will. God doesn't want to leave anyone to face life all alone. **So, yes, please invite God's Spirit to come and live with you today.**

End III.

Conclusion: These two pictures tell a story of “*Spirited Living*”—a boy and his father are enjoying life together—a father and his sons shivering together under a blanket. **Yet, many people are trying to face life without their Father. They’re blindly trudging** along without keeping in touch with God. **But God does want us all to be fully alive.** God’s Spirit is freely available to all who will receive God’s Spirit. **So, invite God’s Spirit to come and live with you.** Don’t keep walking around half-dead, receive the gift of God’s Holy Spirit, and begin “*Spirited Living*” today. **Amen.**

Like Paul, no pastor ever wants to see believers who lack God’s Holy Spirit. If you’ve received God’s mercy but you lack God’s power, you need to open your heart to God’s Spirit today. The realities of the pandemic prohibit me from personally laying hands on each of you, but I can extend my hands toward you and invoke God’s Spirit. If you are able, please stand up, look heavenward, and hold your hands in front of you palms up (*pause.*) “***Almighty God, pour upon each of these gathered here the Holy Spirit for their work as members of Christ’s Holy Church, Amen.***” Now, please join with me as we prayerfully sing “***Spirit of the Living God***” together.

Closing prayer: Let’s pray. Almighty God, your Spirit has been alive and active in this place today. Thank you for not leaving us to face this life all alone. We can indeed do all things through the Spirit of Christ living in us. **Amen.**

10:30 Closing Hymn: “*God of Grace and God of Glory*” Red Hymnal No. 577
All Four Verses

Sending Forth: God’s Holy Spirit has been present in our fellowship this day, as we have worshiped God in Spirit and in truth. Go forth and serve the Lord your God through the Power of God’s Holy Spirit living in you. **And all of God’s people said...Amen!**