

**“Spitting Image” based on Acts 2:1-11, John 14:8-17, 25-27, and Genesis 1:1-5, 2:7-8**

**Delivered on Pentecost by Pastor Drew Mangione on June 5, 2022, for Shelby Presbyterian Church**

When I was a child, I didn't look much like my father. It was never said of me that I was his “spitting image” though I had heard the saying. And it was a saying that confused me, after all – What is a “spitting image”? Since most of the kids about whom this phrase was said, were the kids who were often causing trouble, I decided it must have been an insult to the parents. I thought it was saying to a parent, “that kid of yours looks like you, but at your worst – how you look when spitting.”

Now, the origin of this phrase “spitting image” is uncertain, but there are some theories. The majority of linguists think the phrase should properly be “spit AND image.” One defense of this argument is drawn from the Genesis passage. Namely that if God formed the first human or Adam from the dust, it must have required a fluid to mold mud for God to breath into. So then, the spit was needed to make humans in God's image. There are also theories outside of the biblical literature, but since the bible formed so many idioms, this is as good a theory as any.

Still, there are minority opinions on this, and another possible, but less popular explanation, is that the phrase was originally, “spirit and image,” as in their behavior and appearance. Now, this fits my childhood impression of the phrase, since, to use another expression, the trouble making kids were apples that didn't fall far from the tree. Regardless of whether this is the true origin of “spitting image,” when I heard this theory, it seemed to connect to Pentecost for me. After all, this is a holy day in which we recognize the Holy Spirit, and that we bear God's spirit and image in us, and by this, we are called to reflect God, to be a “spitting image.”

Indeed, in the portions of Genesis 1 and 2 that we read today, we see the power of the Spirit. The Spirit in creation broods or hovers over the chaos and the abyss, or nothingness, and so, this maternal brooding of the Spirit brings order to creation and brings life. The word in Hebrew for Spirit here is the same word for wind or breath. This is why I don't like using the old term “Holy Ghost,” because it's not a ghost, which comes from German translations, for a bodily being. No, the Spirit is the movement and invisible presence of God, encompassing, empowering, creative, life-giving, and who brings about new things, inspires and guides the faithful.

And so, when the dust is formed – it does not matter what water was used to make mud – the earthling or creature made from the dust, is given life directly by the breath of life. Here again, a different Hebrew word holds a depth of meaning – breath and spirit – are blown, or breathed, into the nostrils of this pile of dirt, this literal earthling, to become a truly living being, a soul, an identity. It becomes Adam. This is not the mere function of breathing air in and out, but it comes directly from the God in whose image this pile of dirt has been formed or put in order.

Friends, this is how we are supposed to be, formed in the spirit and image of God, with the capacity and freedom, to both love and create. Yet, from the beginning, with the first Adam, we have been more like “spitting” images as I understood it as a child, using our capacity and freedom to both love and create to sin, turning away from God. In this, we do not reflect the

true God with our spirit and image, but a corruption. It is easy for us, with all the power that God has given us to love and create the wrong things – power, money, and our popularity – and false gods – our own Zeus, Mammon, and Aphrodite.

Pentecost tells us that the breath of life, given by the Holy Spirit, was not enough for us to both have God's freedom and use that freedom to serve God's will. We need some help – a helper, an advocate, one who calls out beside us (paraclete). Indeed, we need and have received the Holy Spirit itself. We need the movement and presence of God in and among us, encompassing and empowering all that we do, so that the creative, life-giving, power entrusted to us, brings about a ministry of reconciliation to God, and to each other as a diverse community through inspiration and guidance, to love one another, as Jesus loves us.

This is what the Acts passage and the passage from John's gospel are showing us. In Acts, the apostles are again hiding – gathered together in one room – seemingly afraid. They hid like this 50 days earlier after Jesus had been crucified and buried. It was there that the risen Jesus came to them and explained it all. In his ministry, he had told them who he was and what he would do, but it was only after he had risen that it was clear that he was Emmanuel. He was the God of Israel with them in their flesh. He was the true temple, the meeting place of heaven and earth. He went to the cross for them and us, enduring its shame, so that we might have his righteousness.

It is by this death on the cross, that we are prepared, made clean, to be temples ourselves, so that God's Holy Spirit, the very presence of God, might dwell in us and among us. The prophecy from Joel says that it will be poured out on all flesh. This is all people, and that sons and daughters will proclaim, the young and old will see, and even the enslaved – those bound by the world – will prophesy. Christ died for all the world, so that all might have the Holy Spirit poured out on all of us.

We see the diversity of the crowd gathered – the Parthians and Medes of modern Iran, the Elamites of modern Iraq, and others living in that region of Mesopotamia. We see people of Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, and Pamphylia, from around the Black Sea in modern Turkey and southern Ukraine. And then Egypt, Libya, meaning the whole of Africa, are there. Then Rome, and Crete, to represent the Mediterranean nations, with Arabs from the whole Arabian peninsula. For the most part to those reading, this would've been the whole known world.

From the disciples gathered and out to the people who came to see what was going on, the Spirit pours out on all flesh – representatives first of the whole known world –so that all people might know the presence of the one true God of Israel. This image of the first gathering of a massive, post resurrection church, is the unity of all people – a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural. It comes even as they know and state their own national identities, and yet, each one hears the Spirit in their native tongue.

The Spirit does not take away each one's tribe, but it removes the tribalism and competition between them. It does not erase nations from which they come, but rejects nationalism that says one nation is better or more beloved by God than another. These backwater Galileans,

known for being the uncivilized among the Jews, with bad accents, are proclaiming to people of every nation and being understood in and by the Spirit. A community is formed, and God's Spirit is seen in this moment at work.

Last weekend, Claire was in New York and saw a Broadway show, called "Come from Away," about the island of Newfoundland, where planes landed after the tragedy of 9/11. People from all over the world were redirected from flights into US Airspace, onto this island where there was an old but very large airport. The people of the community immediately rallied to welcome their guests, and they did everything in their culture to make people feel welcome, even breaking out the "Ugly Stick." If you know anything about Newfoundland, it's culture is unique.

And so, you can imagine the way people must have felt, not knowing just what had happened in New York or why they could not land, not knowing fully why they were there, and then having to trust these strangers, these Galileans of Canada.

One story I want to share is about passengers from an unspecified African nation, for whom there was no one to translate. There was no one to explain what was going on. They got off their plane, not at their destination and were put on a bus going to a Salvation Army camp. The locals were proud to put on their uniforms to help and to serve. But without any context, to these people from the plane, all they see are military uniforms taking them to a internment camp. They refuse to get off of the bus. They are with the Galileans of Canada, in the middle of nowhere and you can imagine how afraid they were as soldiers received them.

The bus driver tries to be polite, but he has no idea what to say to convey he is helping. But he sees something in a woman's arm, something that looks familiar to him. It looks like a bible. So, he motions to receive it from her, and he cannot read its language, but he knows the placement of the books of the bible, and assumes rightly, that in any language the chapter and verse numbers would be there. And so, he turns to Philippians 4, verse 6, and points to it. *"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."*

Like the Galilean disciples, this remote Canadian, showed his true sophistication, letting the Spirit guide him and finding a way to speak from his own native language to another person who otherwise could not understand. It conveyed to these African people on the bus a kinship, a unity, not by immediately dissolving who they were in that bus, but by revealing a commonality they shared, and communicating peace. This is the peace that comes in and through the Spirit.

In the culture of Newfoundland, there is nothing odd about Salvation Army uniforms, but to an outsider with no understanding, it does seem strange. They do look like military uniforms and so you can see how this would have been unsettling for these people, with a language barrier, a lack of information, and now this. Yet, through the Spirit, they heard in their native tongue, that they were safe, that all would be ok, and they trusted. They then recognized the Spirit and image of Christ, in the selfless love of the volunteers helping.

My sisters and brothers, truly the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all flesh, and Jesus said the Spirit calls out at our side, it is our advocate, our helper, our paraclete, which means “one who calls out for, or with.” Just as Philip was still stumped as to who Jesus was and is as one with the Father, so too, the world is stumped and does not recognize the Spirit’s presence. It is not able to receive the Spirit, because it does not know, and it does not see, that the Spirit is present and real.

The Spirit being poured out on all flesh, does not mean the Spirit speaks through all people who talk. There are plenty who speak words that sound wise, but are not filled with the Spirit, including those who take the Lord’s name in vain, claiming to speak for God but sowing division and hate. Yet also, when we abide – or remain, rest, and reside in Christ – that is when we are able to recognize the Spirit in and among us, speaking consistent to the words of Scripture revealed to us, and working in and through us not to divide but to reconcile us in Christ.

Likewise, when Jesus says we will be granted anything asked for in his name, let me be clear, putting “in Jesus’s name” on any request, be it a million dollars or the like. This not asking in Jesus’s name, it is again using the Lord’s name in vain. Rather, asking in Jesus’s name means asking for something, while bearing his identity, seeking what is in God’s Spirit and image, because when we – as many together – do this, then we can do, as Jesus said, greater things than him. We can bring awareness of God’s presence, the good news or gospel to others, to those who do not yet know how much God loves them and that God is with them.

Indeed, we need to be energized by the Spirit, as Carol Ann told the kids about, and plug in to our church community, plug in to prayer, and plug in to reading scripture. This is because in doing so, we plug in to the Spirit that is already within us, and we are better able to reflect the image of God into this broken world. Imagine what we could do, if we really believed and trusted, that God’s Spirit was in us. What if we let that Spirit transform us, not by trying to change that spirit into what we want, but by letting it change us? Imagine we let the Spirit help us be part of the solution in this world by loving self-sacrificially as Jesus loved us, and creating for the benefit of others. This would allow us to be part of reconciling all things in Christ, by being his Spirit and Image to the world.

When we see pain and struggle in this world, listen for the Spirit crying out to you and with you. Listen for the Spirit, moaning at your side, as Paul says, praying with you when you do not have the words. Do not let this world tell you that things cannot change, but join in the Spirit, and have the child-like faith to believe that mature individuals, can let the Spirit guide them to love and create a better world. Believe that we can join in the new creation and not just accept the horrors of this world as inevitable, but actually do something.

Let the Spirit guide you in the new creation begun by Jesus on the cross. Live into the Spirit and Image of our God. The Kingdom of God is not just getting to heaven, punching your ticket to the afterlife. No. The Kingdom of God is the presence of God with us. The kingdom is now, and it is indeed within you. Amen.