

## **“Spirits Are Not Only Scary Or Drinkable”**

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A drunk guy lost his keys after being in a bar late one night. He was on his hands and knees, looking around a street light. A cop shows up and asks the drunk guy, “What are you doing?” and the drunk guy says, “I’m looking for my keys.” So the cop gets on his hands and knees and starts looking for the guy’s keys. After a few minutes, the cop says, “Are you sure you lost your keys around this street light?” The drunk guy says, “Oh no, I lost them in the park across the street, but the light’s better here.” Apparently, the drunk guy had had a few too many spirits. But those are not the kind of spirits I want to talk with you about today. And I don’t want to talk with you about scary spirits, the ones we see in the movies or on TV. I want to talk with you about our spirits: your spirit and my spirit.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin says we are all spirits. He was a French philosopher and a Catholic priest in the first half of the last century. He said, “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience.” Exactly! I love that quote. “We are not human beings having a spiritual experience, we are spiritual beings having a human experience.” I believe that’s true. No, I know that’s true! I know that I am a spiritual being and not just a human being. I hope that you believe and know that you are a spiritual being and not just a human being. We are all spiritual beings.

The Apostle Paul tells us to live by the Spirit. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul writes, “Live by the Spirit.” And that’s what I try to do. I try to live by the Spirit. I listen for the Spirit, I listen for the still, small voice within, I try to be guided by the Spirit. Almost every night I spend a half hour or so sitting on my couch in the living room listening for the Spirit, trying to be guided by the Spirit, listening for the still, small voice within. You can call it meditation or contemplation or just sitting in silence, whatever you want to call it, I hope you do something similar. Whether you do it for a half hour or however long you do it, I hope you take time to listen for the Spirit, to live by the Spirit, to listen for the still, small voice within, to do as Paul said and live by the Spirit.

Spirits were lifted in church this past Sunday, thanks to some Russian singers. The St. Petersburg Men’s Ensemble lifted our spirits. They sang sacred and secular Russian songs. I don’t know if any of us understood a word of it, but it was very beautiful and people said afterwards it was magnificent. And it really was. And I think it lifted people’s spirits. I know it lifted mine. Music does that. Music lifts my spirit. Whether it’s listening to Russian singers or James Brown singing “I Feel Good” or The Beatles singing “Let It Be” or Carol King singing “I Feel the Earth Move Under My Feet.” Music lifts my spirit, speaks to my spirit. I hope music lifts your spirit and speaks to your spirit, whatever kind of music you enjoy, whether it’s Frank Sinatra or Nickelback. I hope you take time to listen to music and that it lifts your spirit and speaks to your spirit.

The Psalmist tells us that God shows us how to live by the spirit. God guides our spirit. I know that’s true for me, that God guides our spirit and shows us the path to take. I know that I don’t always follow it. God sometimes says, “Go this way,” and I sometimes go that way, but then God gets me back on the right path, the way the Psalmist tells us God does. God cares about our spirit, cares about us, and shows us the path to take. I hope that that happens with you, that God shows you the path to take, that God guides your spirit.

My spirit is lifted when I’m walking on the beach. I love to walk on the beach. I don’t know what it is – the sun, the sand, the surf – it’s the spirit-lifting trifecta. It just lifts my spirit, speaks to my spirit, whether I’m walking on the beach at Oceanside or Santa Monica or when we go back to Michigan and I’m walking on the beach along Lake Michigan. I don’t go swimming in the ocean. I haven’t gone swimming in the ocean since the movie “Jaws” came out. Or since they started seeing sharks along the coastline in southern California. But I do enjoy walking the beach, walking on the pier at Oceanside or Santa Monica. There’s just something about the water that lifts my spirits, that speaks to my spirit. I hope that happens to you. When we go back to Michigan, I do go swimming in Lake Michigan. As far as I know Jaws can’t get me there. Although when the movie came out a few years ago, I wouldn’t even swim in Lake Michigan. I know, embarrassing. But I do get my spirit lifted. My spirit is spoken to somehow, for some reason, when I’m walking along the beach. I hope that happens with you, whatever you do. I hope your spirit gets lifted and your spirit gets spoken to, when you’re walking along the beach or whatever you do.

The Spirit has been around since the beginning of time. We read in the book of Genesis, “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...and the Spirit of God moved along the face of the waters.” Maybe that’s why I like walking on the beach. Maybe I can see the Spirit of God moving on the face of the water. I believe I can see the Spirit of God moving along the face of the earth. I even believe I see the Spirit of God moving on the face of strangers. I hope that happens with you. Does it? Do you see the Spirit of God moving on the face of the waters? Do you see the Spirit of God moving on the face of the earth? Do you even see the Spirit of God moving on the face of strangers? I hope so.

The Obamas went to Yosemite National Park this past week. President Obama is trying to draw attention to national parks that have been around forever, but that have been designated national parks in the last hundred years. I've never been to Yosemite National Park, but this summer Kathleen and I are planning to go to the Grand Canyon, which I assume is a national park. And I can't help but believe that will lift my spirit, that will speak to my spirit, seeing the Grand Canyon. I may walk out on that glass platform they have (I may just peek over, but I may walk out on it), and I know it will lift my spirit. I know it will speak to my spirit. I know I will see the Spirit of God moving in the Grand Canyon. Has that happened to you? I'm assuming you've been to national parks and seen your spirit lifted, felt moved, felt your spirit spoken to. We are spiritual beings.

Jesus says God is spirit. In the gospel of John, Jesus says, "God is spirit and those who worship God must worship God in spirit and truth." Maybe that's why we are spiritual beings, because God is spirit and we are made in God's image. As Pierre Teilhard de Chardin says, "We are spiritual beings having a human experience." I believe because we are made in the image of God and God, as Jesus says, is spirit. And sometimes our spirit is passive, when we're praying or meditating. When Jesus was praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before he was crucified, his spirit, I believe, was passive. But when he was overturning the moneychangers' tables, I believe Jesus' spirit was active.

My spirit was active a few years ago when I went with a bunch of other ministers to Washington, D.C. We lobbied Congress to pass the Matthew Shepard Hate Crimes Bill, which Congress did eventually pass. When I'm doing something like that, my spirit is active. My spirit is lifted. Before the Iraq war, when I was marching for peace, and during the Iraq war, when I was marching for peace, my spirit was active, my spirit was lifted. Sometimes our spirit is passive; it's cool, calm, and collected, when we're praying, meditating, like Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. But sometimes our spirit is active, when our spirit is restless, maybe even angry, outraged at some injustice, like Jesus was when he overturned the moneychangers' tables. And then we need to act on that. We need to cry out for justice sometimes. We need to work for justice sometimes. Most times I hope your spirit is passive, cool, calm, and collected when you're praying, when you're meditating. But sometimes I hope your spirit is active, is restless, angry, outraged at some injustice, when you cry out for justice and when you act for justice. And when you do that, I believe your spirit will be lifted. And I believe other people's spirits will be lifted as well.

Let us pray:

*God of love,*

*Help us to know that we are spiritual beings.*

*Help us to most times have a passive spirit.*

*And help us to sometimes have an active spirit.*

*Now and forevermore.*

*By the power of the Holy Spirit.*

*And in the name of Jesus.*

*Amen.*