

This probably falls in the “humble brag” category – but it is also the sharing of a proud dad. At last week’s commencement ceremony at the College of Wooster, our son Elliot was one of three students given the opportunity to speak to their peers, and those assembled to celebrate them. He did a beautiful job. One of the adages around which he centered his message, was a saying he learned from one of his childhood soccer coaches. Here’s what Elliot said,

My coach sat our team down and disputed the common phrase, “Practice makes perfect” by rewording it to, “Practice makes permanent.” This simple rephrasing removes the concept of perfection and instead shifts the focus of the saying toward the impact of your actions. Perfection does not coexist with human nature; it is our mistakes and consequential actions that make us who we are. ...However, when we practice the proper response to these setbacks and grow in these moments, it solidifies our ability to be permanently better individuals.

That’s pretty good advice, I have to say!

Elliot went on to say that anyone who is in a performance-based arena is acquainted with the rigors of practice; so that when the time comes to put the practice into action, one is able to flow in the moment.

(Be ready with the film clip)

Some are able to translate what they do in the studio, court, recital hall, field, etc into a mantra that guides their outlook on life. As Elliot’s arena was on the football pitch – as well as in the classroom – I want to introduce you to another

character whose passion for his sport translates into an overall view of life itself. Let's take a look.

 Football is Life!!.mp4

Ah yes, Dani Rojas – Football is Life!!

Dani Rojas places his philosophy within the context of football/soccer. As the “Ted Lasso” series plays out, his joyful, exuberance faces challenges. Throughout the series, the meaning behind “Football is Life!!” expands to reflect both the highs and the lows of life:

Pure Joy: Originally, Dani uses it to chant and celebrate when he is simply happy to be on the pitch.

But eventually, like all of us, he and the team must deal with **Life's Complexities**. After going through a rough patch, Dani's perspective evolves (with help from the team's therapist) when he learns to reword the mantra to "Football is life, football is also death, football is football too... but mostly, football is life."

Dani also learns **Endurance**. In difficult times, the catchphrase becomes a coping mechanism—a reminder that despite heartbreaking losses, the game, and life, go on.

(Did you all know that the actor who plays Dani Rojas, Cristo Fernández, recently signed a professional soccer contract with a team in El Paso, TX?)

Indeed, it is not just athletes or musicians or public speakers who are called to engage in the disciplines of practice. All of life is filled with opportunities to learn and grow and, hopefully, prepare us to meet the moments that are ahead of us.

I was grateful to Jim Christensen for accepting the invitation to preach while I was celebrating Elliot last week; also, that he shared his sermon with me. What we're discussing today ties in directly with a portion of Jim's message. When speaking about Pentecost, and the empowerment we receive from the Spirit of the risen Christ, Jim said:

So perhaps this season is given to us as a kind of training.

A time to wait without despair. A time to pray without immediate answers.

A time to trust without visible proof.

A time to become the kind of people who are ready... to receive what has never yet been fully known.

For the story does not end with absence.

It does not even end with restored presence.

It continues, with a presence that cannot be taken away.

And this is the way it has always been. The scriptures begin with this witness.

The very first words of the Hebrew Scriptures, Genesis 1:1-2 read:

1 When God began to create the heavens and the earth, 2 the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep. *Rûah 'ĕlōhîm* (רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים) – the *wind, breath, spirit* of God – fluttered upon the surface of the waters.

This life-granting Spirit of God has always been present. It moves throughout all created matter, including the people who inhabit the earth. The story from Numbers bears witness to the Spirit inhabiting and gifting people to perform awesome deeds. Men being men, some would wish to only have the gift of the Spirit indwell a certain few. Moses' response is priceless when asked to make other gifted people stop prophesying: "Are you jealous for my sake?! Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that *Adonai* would put (God's) spirit on them!" (Num 11:29)

Pentecost Sunday is the day on the church calendar when we celebrate the regeneration of the Spirit of God – through the Resurrection event – as Jim said, as a presence that cannot be taken away.

Paul's letter to the community of Christ in Corinth reminds us that the Spirit is reflected within each of us according to the gifts we bear. The letter is a reminder of the abundance the Spirit provides.

The Spirit is not scarce.

The Spirit is not reserved for the powerful, the polished, or the perfect.

The Spirit is Life!!

And that same Spirit is moving among us even now.

Some are given wisdom.

Some are given knowledge.

Some are given faith, healing, prophecy, discernment, compassion, courage, generosity, service, or **music**.

There are varieties of gifts, varieties of services, varieties of activities — but the same Spirit, the same Christ, the same God activating all of them in everyone.

No one here is empty-handed.

No one here is unnecessary.

No one here stands outside the reach of God's *rûah*.

As we were reminded a year ago, each of us is given the manifestation of the Spirit **for the common good**. For we are many members, but one body.

Different stories. Different struggles. Different callings.

Yet one Spirit has baptized us into service – so the weary might be strengthened, the wounded might be healed, the lonely might be welcomed, and the world might catch a glimpse of the living Christ through the Spirit revealed **in how we practice faith**. We practice to make the will of God permanent in what we say and do.

Let us breathe deeply of the Spirit of God.

Offer what you have. Trust that it is enough.

And go into this world alive with the breath of Christ —

because ... **Spirit is Life!!**

Amen.