

Pentecost B - 2018

Acts 2:1-21

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Romans 8: 227-27

John 15: 26-27; 16: 4b-15

Today, we walk on the wild side of God. On the day of Pentecost, a wild spirit encompassed the early Christian movement, shaking everything up and breaking down the barriers that separate humankind. Fire and wind, turning everything upside down, uniting the separated, and inviting everyone to be part of God's community. In this Pentecost, diversity becomes a blessing not a source of alienation – there is no in or out, or superior or inferior, but a democracy of the spirit embracing the least and the most. Pentecost defies our rational categories; it is truly a mystical experience...ⁱ

In Christian tradition, Pentecost is the word is used for the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples after Jesus had ascended to heaven. We understand that the Holy Spirit came on this day and empowered those frightened disciples, huddled together in a room praying, to step out into the world and become apostles and messengers, of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

We heard the story from Acts. [simple version now] This story is about wild chaos in the streets. Tongues of fire rested on each one of the gathered disciples. People were pointing and screaming, **“Your head’s on fire!!!”** They began to feel the Holy Spirit blowing their robes from all directions. They felt a strange burning in their hearts. They spoke in other languages they didn’t know about God’s deeds of power. It is this wild, empowering Spirit that we celebrate today. It is this wild, empowering Spirit that drew

thousands to suddenly change their beliefs and confess that “Jesus is LORD”.

This Holy Spirit came to make trouble and to turn things upside down. This Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, who got into so much trouble that he was executed. *Pastor David Lose wrote: ...the Advocate comes to testify...and to prompt the testimony of the disciples. It's Jesus' testimony to the truth, of course, that got him in trouble in the first place, and the Holy Spirit comes to prompt the disciples to make the same disturbing, disruptive, and world-changing testimony that calls into question the values of the world.*ⁱⁱ

Christian scripture and doctrine teaches that the Spirit is ready to move into all people who will grasp its teachings. In the collect we express the understanding of Pentecost by praying these words: “...on this day you opened the way of eternal life to

every race and nation by the promised gift of your Holy Spirit.” The story from Acts tells how the disciples were able to spread the teachings of Jesus IMMEDIATELY to people: **“from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem”**. This is an energized and active Spirit. In the Psalm, we remember the truth that God created acts with sometimes frightening power: **He looks at the earth and it trembles; he touches the mountains and they smoke.**

This Holy Spirit comes to this created world and to the people in it, not first for our needs, but for the fulfillment of God’s purpose. We are given the power of the Spirit for the glory of God, for the building up of the church and to bring to fruition the fullness of God’s kingdom in God’s eternal time. Each Christian, around the world and through time, is baptized into one community, God’s kingdom, and sealed with

the Holy Spirit. Our baptism is designed to empower us for ministry. That ministry lasts through this life and into the next. In a few minutes we will renew our baptismal vows and remember what we are called to do, and we remember especially today that we will be empowered to do all things in Christ. The Children's Catechism we have been hearing from explains Pentecost power:

(Question) What were the results of Pentecost? The Holy Spirit filled the first Christians with joy by revealing what Jesus had done for us. The Spirit inspired them to understand and proclaim the gospel, and to live a new life together in thanksgiving to God. (The next question is):

How do these results continue today? The Holy Spirit also moves us to understand and believe the gospel, gives us strength and wisdom to live by it, and unites us into a

new community called the church. (Later, it goes on):

What else does the Holy Spirit do for the church? The Spirit gathers us to worship God, builds us up in faith, hope and love, and sends us into the world to proclaim the gospel and work for justice and peace.ⁱⁱⁱ

We are not called individually, but called to be gathered as a church...the universal church...not the denominational church...to be God's people here on earth. Sam Portero, a retired priest, examines this idea of how we are all called by the same Spirit and how difficult that idea can be to grasp:

“We share our baptism with a pope in Rome, with shrill televangelists and enthusiastic holy rollers, with backwoods believers who handle snakes, and with bearded patriarchs whose minds and sanctuaries are closed to the ministry of

women. We share our baptism in common with fanatic millennialists holed up in the hills with automatic weapons and with gentle Mennonites who deny themselves the convenience of automatic washers. We share our baptism in common with a host of strange and wonderful people who have made the same promises and heard the same good news of God's love. With our comfortable homes and our comfortable churches, with our good living and self-righteous opinions of ourselves, we forget that to be called a child of God is to be called into strange places and diverse relationships, to be called into some rough company and some big trouble....I wish we could say that every baptized child will live happily ever after. Instead, we can only say that this child will live forever, will always be God's, even as we are."^{iv}

Pastor Lose, who we heard from earlier, reminds us: *we have been joined by our Baptism into communities of faith that look for – and expect! – the Holy Spirit to come along side us and shake things up, preparing and equipping each and all of us to share the disruptive, surprising, and life-giving word of grace of the God who will not rest until all people enjoy abundant life.*

We are here to be God's people and to do God's work. We are here to receive and give God's love. God has a dream and God gives dreams to human beings. What Peter preaches in the streets at Pentecost is from the prophet, Joel. It promises that God will give vision, foresight and dreams to his people. There is the famous line from The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's, "I have a dream...." Dr. King built on a solid biblical foundation. Often, the message of God to the prophets came in the form of dreams.

Messages to the Kings of Israel and to Joseph, father of Jesus, came in dreams. We are expected to dream Big for God. What are our visions, our dreams and imaginings for this church? Have you given up dreaming? God comes again and again to shake things up and bring us new ideas and new expectations. Look for God's ideas in your thoughts and dreams!!!

We are called, as Christians, to use the power of the Holy Spirit, working in us, to live as Jesus lived. We are called, in the power of the Spirit, to walk in the ways of those earliest Christians who followed Jesus. Pentecost shows us what God intended. God intended unity. The teaching of Jesus is that we are all to be one, even as he and the Father are one. We who believe are called to lead other people to profess the name of Christ, to celebrate that One Body, One Spirit, one God and Father of us All.

In this season of transition, the Church of the Holy Spirit will redefine what that looks like for this group of people in this time and place. I do not believe it will look like the streets of Jerusalem at Pentecost, but it must look appealing to the people of Southern Ocean County in 2018 and 2019 and 2020. You must catch God's dream for this place and time.

Remember that all the children of God are all moved by that same Spirit, but that there are varieties of gifts and varieties of activities. Inevitably, among humans, there will be conflicts and differences. We will not all think the same things, believe the same things, act the same way, or come to any miraculous agreement about God or God's purposes on this earth. Yet we Christians are called, by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus AND through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, to follow the Way of Christ

and the path of discipleship. Our oneness is symbolized in the common table at which all the baptized are welcomed and fed. And we are all called, through Christ, to reach out the people around us, seeing each other through the eyes of God, to seek peace and justice in the world, despite our differences, and to bring about the fulfillment of God's kingdom, now and in the age to come.

Let us pray as Paul prayed for the tiny church in Rome so many years ago: *Remember God's promise, that hope will not disappoint you, because God's love has been poured into your hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.* (Adapted

from Romans 5:5)^y AMEN.

-
- ⁱ Bruce Epperly,
<http://www.patheos.com/blogs/livingaholyadventure/2015/05/pentecost-sunday-may-24-2015/>
- ⁱⁱ David Lose, <http://www.davidlose.net/2015/05/pentecost-b-come-alongside-holy-spirit/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ *Belonging to God: A First Catechism*, 1998, PCUSA
- ^{iv} Sam Portaro, *Daysprings*, p. 217-219.
- ^v <http://evangelismconnections.org/weekly-evangelectionary-for-sunday-may-24-2015/>