

HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT MOVE TODAY?

Pentecost Sermon for May 23, 2010

Scripture: Acts 2:1-12, Romans 8:14-17, John 14:25-27

Pentecost, originally known as Shavuot by the Jews is described in Leviticus 23 as the Festival or Feast of Weeks, occurring seven weeks and one day after the Passover. The Jewish people celebrated this day as the anniversary of God giving the Torah to the entire Israelite nation assembled at Mount Sinai. The word Pentecost comes from the ancient Greek meaning 50th, the number of days the festival was held after Passover. So by the time of the reading in Acts, this big harvest festival had been celebrated for 100's of years. Faithful Jews from far and wide came to make offerings to God. At this particular festival described in Acts Jesus had left, he had ascended nine days earlier, telling his followers not to leave Jerusalem until they had received the Holy Spirit.

Try to imagine the scene Luke writes about; try to see yourself in the picture. The apostles were all there except for Judas. In the previous chapter we are told that the apostles and certain women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers and other believers were staying together in a room upstairs, constantly devoting themselves to prayer. So here we are all together with friends and with believers from the Diaspora, many who spoke languages that we did not understand. And suddenly there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, filling the whole house. Not only was there a loud sound but then we saw

tongues of fire. Next all are filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak about God's power in a language not their own but one that everyone could understand without any translation.

How could this happen? What does it mean? One of my favorite authors, Mark Nepo says, "The moment we speak from the truth of compassion, we speak the same language always waiting underneath our differences." This is because we are speaking from the divine center of things, from our own understanding of God, from our authentic selves. This is the miracle and the possibility of Oneness that I preached about last week.

This is one of the greatest stories of our Christian faith. It is a story that speaks to us about the beginnings of the Christian church, of the moment in our history when the Spirit of God blew into a gathering of Jesus followers and forever changed their own life stories. It is story filled with amazement and confusion, with disbelief and wonder. It is a story that has been seen as a beginning, as a new birth, as the birthday of the church. I wonder how many Christians hear this story once a year and think of it as something weird that happened back then in the early days of the church and fail to see how it can be in any way connected to our own lives and faith today.

Barbara Brown Taylor in preaching about Pentecost points out that, "In the first four books of the New Testament, we learn the good news of what God did through Jesus. In the book of Acts, we learn the good news

of what God did through the Holy Spirit, by performing artificial resuscitation on a room full of well-intentioned bumbler and turning them into a force that changed the history of the world". She goes on to ask, "The question for me is whether we still believe in a God who acts like that. Do we still believe in a God who blows through closed doors and sets our heads on fire? Do we still believe in a God with power to transform us, both as individuals and as a people, or have we come to an unspoken agreement that our God is pretty old and tired by now, someone to whom we may address our prayer requests but not anyone we really expect to change our lives?"

So my questions for you this morning: do you believe in a powerful Pentecostal God that can change our lives through the Holy Spirit? And if so, how do you see the Holy Spirit moving in the world today? (my sermon title)

I'll share my thoughts on these questions and then if any of you wish to share you may. Even though I say and believe that with God all is possible, yet I'm not so sure I believe that God is going to rain tongues of fire on us. Yet I do believe in a powerful, loving God that can bring about transformation, in our lives and in the world. As I said a few weeks ago when preaching about my hospital experience, I have no doubt that the Holy Spirit is always with us. For the 12 step programs, this force is called

the Higher Self. Different people Christians or not, have different names for this divine force. The Holy Spirit is what we are talking about when we use the phrase sighs too deep for words. It means to me that when I can't find words or know what to do, the Spirit inside of me will take over. In our Romans 8 reading, Paul says when we cry, "Abba! Father!" it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit." It's an intimacy of being family, joint heirs with Christ to both the suffering and the glory.

Do you remember that the Greek and Hebrew words for breath, wind and Spirit are the same: pneuma in Greek and ruah in Hebrew? So we have with us every moment a reminder of the Spirit, every time we breathe. It is so natural to feel overwhelmed at all the things that are not going right in both our world and the larger world. We want a faith that comforts and consoles us; instead God has a way of challenging us. We are not in charge; God is. The Spirit can open our eyes to see things in a new way. The Spirit opens our hearts to a new creation of possibility and hope. I believe God needs our help. If we expect great things from God and from ourselves, there's a good chance that great things will happen.

So now let's think about how the Holy Spirit moves in our world today? First from the Bible: The Spirit is at work wherever there is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control," for these are the fruits of the Spirit as Paul lists them in Galatians 5. In Acts 2, directly following the scripture Betty read, from

Peter's speech, as well as in Isaiah: the Spirit is at work wherever "young people prophesy" against injustice and "see visions" of hope and wherever elders still "dream dreams" of a better world. The Spirit is moving in our world when we reach out to others to share our faith and our love in the many ways we do at this church. "The Holy Spirit speaks through broken people to a broken world, using language every broken heart can hear and understand."¹ The Holy Spirit is unpredictable, can't be pinned down; however she leaves her fingerprints wherever there is forgiveness, reconciliation, and grace. I know she works through this congregation in small and big ways. Do any of you want to share how you see the Spirit moving in our world today?

Even before Pentecost, Jesus breathed on his disciples and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit." With every breath, we too can experience Spirit, enabling us to receive and give the divine inspiration that transforms all things.

In John's gospel we read, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever....He abides with you and will be in you." (vs. 15-17) . The Spirit blesses us with the spiritual grace to live in love for God and neighbor as did Jesus himself. Happy Birthday Church.

¹ Leonard Sweet, online sermons

