

Sermon

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Pentecost: Acts 2:1-4 and Galatians 5:22-26

Please pray with me: may the Spirit of truth, hope, and joy, spoken and received, blow through our reflection on your Word. Amen.

To prepare for this sermon, I went for a walk, thinking some movement might help me come up with a dramatic opening story about the Holy Spirit. But I got distracted by the experience of the walk itself. It was a gusty day. The tress rustled and the leaves nearly twinkled as first the underside and then the top was exposed. I caught a whiff of pine needles that brought me back to wonderful memories of camping in the Pacific Northwest. I bent down to look at dandelion poofs, and watched as the first one little seed helicopter took off from one, to some unknown destination where it could take root. I felt the coolness of the breeze wafting across my sweaty skin.

I found my story of the Spirit, not in drama but in the ordinariness of life. A wind that blows everywhere and touches everyone and everything, going where it will. A Spirit that infuses all of our senses, that ruffles the hair. It disturbs business as usual, and asks us to dance with it. It takes us to places we have yet to discover, inviting us to trust that we will be deposited where we can grow. The Spirit is alive, and calls us more fully into life.

Pentecost, the giving of the Holy Spirit to the followers of Jesus, is a big deal for the church. In fact, it's often referred to it as the birth day of the church. The Holy Spirit isn't a new invention at Pentecost, or even a new gift of God. It was the very breath of creation, moving across the face of the waters. And there are instances of the Holy Spirit being given to specific people in every age.

But the Holy Spirit being given to the followers of Jesus and, indeed, for the world, as a whole, comes to us here in the second chapter book of Acts. It fulfills a promise Jesus made before his execution. The Gospel of John puts it this way: "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom God will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you." (John14:26)

On Pentecost the Spirit chose to make a dramatic entrance! Rush of wind, tongues of fire!

Those poor disciples. They would have preferred to continue to hide out. Even as reassured as they were about seeing the resurrected Jesus, he had disappeared for a second time, ascending into the clouds. And his promise that he would come again and initiate the Kingdom that he had preached about had a sketchy time frame. The disciples knew that Rome had put targets on their backs. They were safer inside, hanging out with one another.

But along came the day of Pentecost. 50 days after the Passover, it was a holiday that mandated the Jews in and around Jerusalem to come to the feast that celebrated the gift of the Law of Moses as well as the harvest. It was a time when the streets of Jerusalem were filled. When the Holy Spirit roared onto the scene, She made sure to have an audience! She made sure there were people from many nations to hear this proclamation from Jesus' followers that the good news brought by Jesus was for all people. And She made sure that all who were there could hear and understand the joy of such news. They heard the promise that this oppressed people would prophesy, see visions, and dream dreams of liberation and hope.

But for the Jesus followers, newly anointed to speak the Gospel, this spiritual experience was risky. They were accused of being drunk! Their words were not instantly received. For

some, their worst fears of persecution were realized later as they continued to preach, teach, and live the Word of Life, the Word that desires shalom—for all of creation. But they continued to preach a Words that we hear today.

Yesterday on my hike, I wondered how far a dandelion seed could blow in the wind before coming to a resting plant and rooting. I wondered how far a spark could fly and ignite a flame. That got me to wondering how far the ash cloud blew after Mount St. Helen's erupted in Washington State in 1980. I looked that up. It took less than 24 hours for the ash to travel 2,000 miles to Oklahoma, and within two days it was evident in the smog in the Northeastern states. Within two weeks the ash had traveled around the globe, and today there is still trace evidence of Mt. St. Helen's ash in the atmosphere.

We know the Holy Spirit that blew and flamed at Pentecost is still in the atmosphere. We aren't able to see flames of fire like tongues over the heads of God's people that comes with a violent rush of wind, but we can see the effects. In Paul's letter to the churches at Galatia, he enumerates the attributes of a Spirit-filled life: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

The gifts of the spirit sound so lovely, don't they? So zen. But they can also be messy. We're reminded of this in the story of Jesus overturning the tables in the temple.

For example, the Spirit flutters the rainbow flag over the Capitol here in Madison. Its placement is significant in that it declares that where laws and policies are made, the humanity of LGBTQ people shall be recognized. Or, at least, it's aspirational of such. On this 50th year after the Stonewall Riots in New York that began the gay rights movement, we need to tell the truth about the costs for queer folk that are associated with that flag. For example, black trans women, fed up with police brutality, threw the first bricks as police were once again raiding the gay bar known as Stonewall. And, for all their valor, it is black trans women who remain the target of most hateful speech and harmful physical attacks. They are still giving their lives.

And the Spirit is blowing in those who agitate for freedom from mass incarceration that often begins in our schools. Jesus is savior to those who are on the underside of society. But it's not always pretty. Sometimes the fruit of faithfulness to stand with the poor and marginalized is most needed, and the fruits of gentleness and patience must be put aside.

The Spirit's gift, received 2,000 years ago and at the beginning of creation, continues to inflame righteousness and to blow compassion—outside of these walls and within.

This morning, we bless our faith educators, who have helped encourage the growing of the fruits of the Spirit. Remember, that you may not yourself see the measure of the Spirit's work in them, but you can trust that, just like the volcanic ash in the atmosphere long after the eruption, the seeds of the Spirit you help plant may come to fruit long after you have sown them.

We bless our prayer shawls this morning—the hands that made them, infusing each stitch with the Spirit of love and care; the fellowship of the those who made them, knowing that the Spirit is in the room; and those who will be comforted by the prayer shawls, long after they are gifted.

We also bless our young people who received their Bibles today, trusting that the stories and prayers of this library of our ancestor's encounters with God is a place where they, too, will encounter God and hear the Good News of God's love for themselves. It's a library they can study, a friend they can turn to, a place to wonder and wrestle, and a teacher to help them grow and share the fruits of the Spirit.

Today, we bless the gift of the Holy Spirit to the people of God today. Her winds have blown the good news of Jesus now for over 2,000 years, coming to us new in each generation

and in every day.

Thanks be to God!