

The Day of Pentecost: Whitsunday
May 20, 2018
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Acts 2:1-21
Psalm 104:25-35, 37
Romans 8:22-27
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Every year, on Pentecost Sunday, we read from the 2nd chapter of Acts. We hear once more, as we do every year, how the Holy Spirit came to those first disciples 50 days after that first Easter.

All of our readings are full of the Spirit today. Some of the specific passages change a bit year to year, but that reading from Acts (and the Psalm, as well) remain the same year after year. So it's that account that shapes the day's festivities.

Because of that story, we encourage you to wear red here today, to recall the "divided tongues, as of fire ... rested on each of [the disciples]." And because of that story, we ask you to try to speak with another *linguistic* tongue this morning ... French, perhaps, or Spanish or Swedish or Latvian or Russian or ... And we do this all together to hint at how bewildering and perplexing the scene must have been to those who happened to be in Jerusalem that day.

So that's the constant in our celebration on this Sunday of the Church Year. Always we begin with the disciples "all together in one place" ... sitting down, we're told. Always they gather inside (as do we here on a typical Sunday morning) and then, always, they find themselves blown away by the Spirit, literally swept out into the streets it seems.

We're never told how the disciples got outside, but it's a safe bet it wasn't their plan for the day. It seems to have been forced upon them:

And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind.

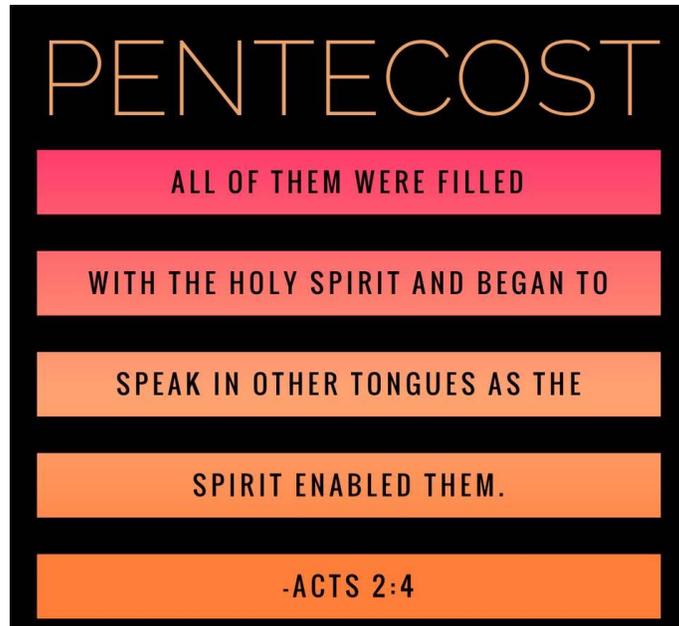
I looked at the translations in this morning's bulletin. In Spanish, it's *viento impetuoso* – an "impetuous wind." I don't speak French, but I picked out a few words: a *violent coup* of wind.

That's how they first experienced the Holy Spirit. The images here aren't safe and cozy; they're of fire and of a violent wind. The power of God unseated them all. And unsettled them, as well. One moment, they're "all together" comfortably inside. And the next, they're "all of them filled with the Holy Spirit" and in the streets. Because of that Spirit, it seems, they had something to say to the folks out there that the folks out there needed to hear.

It behooves us to wonder how the Holy Spirit still moves among us, for Pentecost suggests that she aims to *dislodge* us from taking up residence or from taking our ease. Leaving church is why we came here this morning. Taking the good news out into the streets is why we came here this morning. Proclaiming the love of God for *all* God's people all over the world is why we came here this morning. This isn't Vegas; what happens here was never meant to stay here.

As we hear again this morning, the Spirit comes first to transform us – not just some of us, but all of us – in order that we all might share some good news for our neighbors and our world.

The verse reprinted on the front cover says as much, even as it says they don't speak the same:



I think more is at issue than just the languages spoken on that occasion. I think that single verse hints that there's more than one way for any of us to give voice to the faith that is in us. God, it seems, delights in diversity (as we heard in the Psalm this morning and as we do every year on Pentecost Sunday), and God delights in our diverse experiences and expressions of the Spirit.

In some years, our second reading isn't from Romans but from 1 Corinthians. And in those years we hear these words:

... there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

I have in my office the first edition of *The Book of Occasional Services*, from 1979. As the book title suggests, it's a resource of liturgies for those things we might do occasionally.

There's a section in the book called "Commissioning for Lay Ministries in the Church." None of them are obligatory; the introduction to that section is quite explicit on this point:

The Ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priests, and deacons. Lay persons are commissioned for their ministry by the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, and no form of commissioning for special functions is necessary"

Book of Occasional Services, p. 160

“No form of commissioning,” the book says, “is necessary.” But I’ve followed its pattern at the Annual Meeting the past few years to commission new members of the Vestry.

We could do more. And maybe we should. The book lists 15 different kinds of ministry: we could commission Altar Guild members; we could commission Singers; we could commission Directors of Music, Organists, and other Musicians. We could commission Parish Visitors, and if we did, we might say this prayer for members of our Pastoral Care Team:

O God, your Son Jesus Christ said that we minister to him when we clothe the naked, give food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, and visit the sick and imprisoned: Go with all those who, following the command of your Christ, visit your people in his Name; who lives and reigns for ever and ever. *Amen.* (p. 172)

Pentecost says all of us are called to be bearers of good news. And that means that we each give expression to the faith that is in us our own unique ways.

And it also means that one person’s response is not automatically better – or worse.

It’s not exactly the same, but I think of how people respond to my invitation to come forward for a birthday or anniversary blessing. Whether you come forward or not is in no way a judgment against anyone else. If you don’t come forward for a birthday blessing, it makes you no less a beloved child of God. If you receive an anniversary blessing, it doesn’t mean your marriage is any more sacred than anyone else’s marriage.

Every year on Maundy Thursday, I invite folks to come forward for a foot-washing. Some do. Others don’t. But I trust that the example is not lost on any of us. And I think it’s even a bit courageous NOT to come forward when everyone else seems to be doing so.

Later this morning, we’ll baptize an infant, Robert Palmer Serrano. May he learn not just to take care of himself, but to make the world a better place, as well. May he figure out his own unique way to do so. And may he be grace-filled enough never to look down on another for doing the same in a different way and feisty enough not to accept anyone else’s contempt.

And may all the baptized ever strive to do the same.

A bit later this morning, a few members of this congregation will come forward to make what we’re calling a “vow of nonviolence.” In one sense, at least, their promise isn’t necessary. At every baptism – and on every occasion when we renew our baptismal vows – we all promise to love our neighbors as ourselves, to strive for justice and peace among all people, to respect the dignity of every human being.

The world needs us to live out the words we say. As we heard once more this past Friday, upon receiving the news of ten more people killed in yet another mass school shooting, this time in Santa Fe, Texas, the world is broken and in need of healing.

St. Paul, in our reading from Romans today, offers a lament that all is not right in the world, in creation, and in ourselves. We don't even have words to express it, he says.

But St. Paul goes on to affirm that the Holy Spirit is mysteriously in the middle of it all and working in us. And my point is to affirm, with Paul, that that same Spirit moves in all of us. We're all called to take part in making this world a better place. What some few are doing this morning is not materially different from what all of us are doing this morning.

For that reason, I want to be clear to say to those of you who are not coming forward this morning, "Good for you!" You don't need to do this. And I don't think anyone here thinks you're somehow *for* violence just because you sit this out. And it's good, even a bit courageous, not to do something that isn't in you to do.

And for those of you who ARE coming forward this morning to make a vow, I say the same: "Good for *you*, too!" It's good for you if you're attending to what the Spirit is genuinely (and perhaps uniquely) working on you to do. So good for you as you try to discern what she is saying to you ... and maybe wants to say *through* you.

And it's good for the rest of us to be here with you. It's always good to be present to another, to offer prayers of support and encouragement for one another.

And it's good for all of us to have your example, as well – not so much even the thing you do, the vow you offer, today, but more the example of your longing to discern what is the will of God in your life and your desire to live and love the world as Jesus did ... and as his followers, down through the generations, have always aspired to live in their own times and places.