

Pentecost Sunday May 31, 2020

Acts 2:1-21,1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

On this Pentecost Sunday, I find myself pulled apart a bit by all that is going on around us. So, I beg your indulgence as I offer these reflections, disjointed as they may be.

Last week, we talked about the Ascension of Jesus and how the disciples had been together since then, waiting for the promised Holy Spirit to come. A waiting filled with constant prayer, with worship of God, with conversation around scripture and Jesus' teachings.

And it made me hear the story of Acts differently. It is easy to hear the story of the Spirit as a point in time. Suddenly, the Spirit swoops in and everything changes. But there is not much in life that works that way, is there? Even the tornado that seems to appear out of nowhere has been built by differences in air pressure, humidity and temperature over a period of time. Building, moving, swirling until that moment when it comes into being.

And so, I wonder if the description of what happened on that Pentecost is not the result of the Holy Spirit at work in a point in time, but rather the moment that the disciples could not deny the work that the Holy Spirit had been doing that whole time. Building, moving, swirling, until that moment when it all came into being.

I wonder if the fire that is described above them is not metaphorical. That really the fire burns within them. A fire that we can relate to...that pull within us, that

burning in our heart, that cannot be ignored and demands action, movement, speech.

Martin Luther talks about the Holy Spirit coming to us through means, through the Word of God- Jesus is God's living Word to us (Just read the Gospel of John). Scripture is a means that the Spirit can work through (listen to the witness of those transformed by it). We speak the Gospel to others and the Holy Spirit is at work in our voice (three thousand lives are transformed through Peter by that power on Pentecost).

I believe all this to be true because scripture says so, because my parents and ancestors have believed it, because I have seen it and heard witness to it at work, and it because has been true for me.

I have felt the Holy Spirit move in worship. I remember clearly a youth choir trip to Washington, DC and an evening worship time when I felt in that room a presence that was connected to our worship together but more than that.

I have felt the Holy Spirit move in scripture- a burning in my heart, a conviction in my mind, as I read and know that God is speaking to ME in this passage.

I have seen the Holy Spirit act in my proclaiming- a privilege of my calling as people leave worship and tell me that the stinker of a sermon I thought I just preached, was just what they needed to hear that day. Had made them see something differently. Had transformed them. And you guys know my response is often, "I'm glad the Spirit moved". I have experienced that Holy Spirit acting through the written word of Bonhoeffer, Luther, Bass, and Bolz-Weber as it transformed me and my understanding.

I have felt the burning of the Holy Spirit in my heart- the call to a ministry for which I did not have a tongue. A language. So, I spent time in prayer, worship, study of scripture- at a seminary- and came out three years later with that different language and a call in the church as an Associate in Ministry and then, years later, a Pastor.

I have seen the varieties of gifts that the Holy Spirit brings. I have seen a woman with the gift of discernment- who knows just who to talk to about being on this committee or getting that thing done. I have seen the gifts of service- hands at work washing dishes, cooking meals, fixing plumbing, getting critters out of our soffits, mowing the grass.

I have seen the gifts of teaching- a father who stayed in Confirmation ministry and not moving up with his kids because he had that gift of engaging middle schoolers.

I have seen the gift of deep spirituality in several people. A gift of deep reflection on scripture, of a deep anchoring of faith and what that has meant not only for the people around them but the faith community they are in.

I have seen the variety of service- those who have a passion for assisting those who do not have wealth, who need help navigating the system, of advocating for those who have no voice. And we have seen the need for that this week.

I have seen the variety of activities- mailing cards to those who cannot leave their homes, checking the website, praying daily for those on the prayer list.

I have seen these things and they all come as gifts- in a variety as great as the people who receive them, given through the power of the Holy Spirit.

A power that comes to us through means- through something concrete- and that, I think, builds in us over time until we just can't ignore it anymore.

A burning in the heart like the disciples on the road to Emmaus. A tug towards an action or calling that you never would have considered- how many pastors have told that story?

But note, always, who the Spirit and the gifts that it brings are for? It is not for us but for the common good. For the profit of all of us. In this we know the Spirit is from God; as it directs us to love of neighbor, just as God in Jesus Christ directs us to. Always to love of God and love of neighbor- and we know who are neighbor is thanks to the Gospel of Luke- the one in need and the one who helps us when we are in need.

The Spirit is creative. It is the ruach- breath/wind of God moving over the waters and calling forth life in which God takes delight. The Spirit re-creates us, enlivens us, stirs us to action and movement. And for a thing to be alive it must move, change, grow!

The Spirit inspires- literally gives us breath- yes, but also opens our eyes to see new possibilities. It is the Spirit that leads Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch. It is the Spirit that leads the church to accept Gentiles. It is the Spirit that moves Martin Luther to his reformation. It is the Spirit that leads his namesake, Martin Luther King Jr. to stand up for the rights, the basic humanity of African-Americans and dream of a day when a person is judged not by the color of their skin but the content of their character. The Spirit inspires.

The Spirit is also talked about as fire and wind. Two things that transform and change. That can be both helpful and dangerous.

Fire can destroy- buildings, forests, lives.

But it can also refine, purify, make something new. Stronger.

Wind can destroy- buildings, forests, lives.

But it can also carry you across the oceans, freshen your dwelling place, bring the scent from faraway places, power your life.

The Holy Spirit that comes to us in Baptism, that comes to us through Jesus , through Scripture, through the spoken proclamation of the good news of God is all of these things- fire, wind, breath. Creative and life giving. Refining and purifying. Transporting and tantalizing.

The Holy Spirit brings varied gifts to the many members that make up the Body of Christ that is the church. You. Each of you has been given at least one of these gifts. What are the gifts the Spirit has given to you? How does the Good News of God in Jesus Christ get proclaimed as you use those gifts? Everyday. How are you using them for the benefit of all? For your neighbor, the one in need and the ones who help you when you are in need?

It is not just semantics when my colleagues and I say that the church has never closed during this pandemic because you are the church. The assembly of believers gathered around Word and Sacrament. You, are the hands and feet of Christ at work in the world through this time apart from one another for the sake of one another.

Where do you see the Spirit at work in your life? Where do you feel that wind blowing you in a new direction? That burning desire pulling you to do this thing, to love in that way, to speak, to act?

We are in need of that Holy Spirit as a nation right now. To blow through us and transform us as the sin of our forebearers, of slavery and racism, are visited upon their children. We need the Holy Spirit to open eyes blinded by bias, violence, and division- to see the image of God in all people. To see a better future for all of God's beloved than the one we have today.

We need the Holy Spirit to inspire us- fill us with God's life-giving breath. That we might love our neighbors and our enemies. That we might use the gifts given to us by that Spirit for the upbuilding of others- not to destroy them.

Come Holy Spirit- transform me. Change me. Change us.

Come Holy Spirit- fill me with breath to sing the hymn written by Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa- a man who has dedicated his life to overcoming the sin of apartheid in his country of South Africa and of doing the hard work of reconciling with those who killed so many who looked like him. May it be Gospel truth to us now.

“Goodness is stronger than evil;

Love is stronger than hate;

Light is stronger than darkness;

Life is stronger than death;

Victory is ours through God who loves us.”

Come Holy Spirit, come!