

Pentecost Day

June 8, 2014: Graduation Janelle & Jordan Lief; Pilgrimage Peter Pecora

Ken Wratten at St Stephen's, San Jose

Acts 2:1-21

1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

John 20:19-23

Proof and the Power to Change

Maybe your journey of faith has been something like mine. I grew up hearing the Bible stories about the first people who experienced a personal presence of God in their lives. They saw miracles that defied the laws of nature; they saw God at work in parting the Red Sea, and providing them manna, and pillars of fire by night and cloud by day as they wandered in the desert. Eventually I reached the point of making my own decision to believe in this God I still could not see or hear, and to believe in Jesus as the Son of God... And then I waited and I prayed, asking God to give me sure, unmistakable, impossible to miss, proof that He is here, He is listening, and He is actively present now; and somehow that carries the power to change things.

The Pentecost Day experience gave the first followers of Jesus that irrefutable proof that God was right there, He was listening, and He was actively engaged in their lives. The electric charge in the air was God's own Spirit, landing on, taking up residence in, and infusing the people who had chosen to be followers of Jesus Christ.

In our readings today, there are two different accounts of the Holy Spirit coming upon the followers of Jesus. In John, the time was Easter evening. Jesus quietly entered the locked room where his followers were hiding from the authorities, and by softly breathing on them, he delivered his Holy Spirit to them. Through their receiving the HS, they received not only proof, but the power to change. Instead of being immobilized with fear, they were energized to leave that locked upper room, and start talking about Jesus' message. They started with 11 followers in that room. By Pentecost day there were 120 followers gathered. 11 became 120.

In Acts 2, the time is 50 days after Easter Sunday, and the room they are in is anything but quiet, and the arrival of God's Holy Spirit is anything but a soft breath. "Suddenly a sound came from heaven. It was like a strong wind blowing. It filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw something that looked like tongues of fire. The flames separated and settled on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit." In that experience even more believers receive the power to change. Peter was changed into an energized preacher;

and 3,000 people came to believe in Christ. 120 became 3120. They saw the proof; they claimed the power.

So the Holy Spirit came on Easter evening, and on Pentecost. The Holy Spirit came in Jesus' breath, and in a violent wind and flames of fire landing on the heads of his followers. The God the Holy Spirit brought direct proof, not only through the words of prophets, and the Holy Spirit brought the power to change.

Sometimes God comes to us in a soft breath; like when we get an important insight through another person; or in dreams; or through some 'out of the blue' idea that answers a troubling question, or leads us to make a decision, or to NOT send an email, or to say YES to something we wanted to say NO to.

Sometimes God comes to us in a strong wind and flames of fire; as when we have a miracle of abundance happen to us where we had been losing sleep over our scarcity; or when there are very specific, direct answers to prayer; or when we can see that a very direct incident of God – a God-incident, happened with us or someone we know; an untreatable disease that is healed, seeing an angel, hearing God's voice, feeling the Divine Presence of God brush against us.

The giving of the gift on Pentecost Day reminds you and me to notice and remember and celebrate the gifts we have already experienced in our faith life; and to celebrate the gifts that we have not yet discovered. Some of the spiritual gifts God has for us, we have never claimed. And as Paul reminded the believers in Corinth, spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of building up the church, not ourselves. Are we looking for ways to try out some possible gifts for the building of God's Reign on earth?

"A young man was apprenticed to a master artist who produced the most beautiful stained glass windows anywhere. The apprentice could not approach the master's genius so he borrowed his master's tools, thinking that was the answer. After several weeks, the young man said to his teacher, 'I'm not doing any better with your tools than I did with mine.' The teacher replied, 'So, it's not the tools of the master you need; it's the spirit of the master you need.'"

The Spirit of the Divine Master, the Holy Spirit came and entered the spirits of those people on Pentecost Day. Our own spirit (small-s spirit) within us, is defiant, takes pride in itself, wants to be independent, and wants to control the whole self. The Spirit of God immerses our spirit in God's Spirit in such a way that we are linked with God's will; and that molds us, it indexes our value system,

it influences our friendships, and it adjusts our priorities.

Jesus presents each of us with a custom selected set of gifts, which we are meant to use; we are to combine them with each other's gifts, working together to build up the Reign of God on earth. What we accomplish together is the Proof of God's Spirit at work: And the transformation we accomplish in our neighborhood and in the world confirms God's power to change whatever needs changing: The HS is our proof of God's presence here and now; and proof of God's power and intent to change what needs changing. This world desperately needs the things you and I can build together with the tools we have been given. See the proof – claim the power; SEE THE PROOF – CLAIM THE POWER. Amen.