

Pentecost Day: May 24, 2015

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Stephen's, San Jose

Acts 2:1-11 The HS descends on Jesus' followers, assembled together in an upstairs room. They spoke in other tongues, speaking about God's deeds of power.

Romans 8:22-27 We have the first fruits of the Spirit.

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15 I still have many things to say to you.

The word 'Pentecost' is Greek for fiftieth. In the Old Testament, Pentecost, or the Feast of Weeks, was a spring agricultural celebration, and the first spring crops were harvested fifty days after planting. By Jesus' time, the festival had become more and more a commemoration of the giving of the Law to Moses at Mount Sinai. According to that tradition, fifty days passed between the first Passover in Egypt and the arrival of the escaped Israelites at Sinai.

But for the Christian community, Pentecost marks the dramatic conclusion of our Easter season with celebration and thanksgiving for the new life of the church through God's gift of the Holy Spirit. This was a gift beyond anything those first disciples could imagine.

Jesus had given them hints of a Spirit who would bring them comfort; who would remind them of Jesus; who would encourage them in the truth of faith despite any opposition they might face. But today – what they saw echoed what John the Baptist cried out to his followers in his call for them to be baptized, (Luke 3:16) "I baptize you with water. One more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire." And on this day they saw the fire that did not burn the skin, but it certainly set fire to their spirits. They had received the power to be the voice in the world that has now, according to one record I found, brought 2 billion people to the Christian faith, out of a world population today of 6.9 billion people.

For years I read this passage in Acts 2 incorrectly. I thought that the words spoken by the believers who had received the Spirit were what Paul called 'tongues of angels' (in 1 Cor 13:1). But that is not what happened. They were talking in the languages of the visitors to Jerusalem from around the Middle East and Europe. And what they were saying, without using their own native language, but using languages they had never learned, was "speaking about God's deeds of power." And so beyond Advocate and Comforter is the gift of ability and confidence to witness to the signs of God's power.

Example story: visitor needing ride to hospital.

I keep learning to make space for the Spirit. I keep learning to expect the Spirit to drop circumstances in my lap to witness in all sorts of ways – even by just listening better.

Our visitor saw the love of God; I saw the work and witness of God.
The new language I am still learning is the language of listening.

St. Francis once said, “Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words.” The spiritual power you and I receive from the Spirit shows itself in many ways besides quoting the parables of Jesus.

We show this power of the Spirit when we take the time to listen before trying to solve a friend’s problem. We demonstrate this power when we take action in a situation that requires us to make a decision about whether or not to make a difficult phone call; or take an expensive trip to comfort a friend; or give a homeless person paper money rather than loose change; or to commit time and talent to improve and expand our church programs.

What new language has the Spirit given you? What ways have you used to witness to the power of God in your own life?

The gift of the Spirit is not a gift that answers all our questions about God, but this gift helps us trust that God -the-Spirit is with us every minute; that our awareness of that presence deepens over time; that we can learn to live without having all the answers; and be bold in our witness of God.

Come, Holy Spirit. Amen.