

Pentecost Day: May 15, 2016

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

Acts 2:1-11

The very Spirit of God poured out on all.

Romans 8:14-17

We are led by the Spirit of God.

John 14:8-17, 25-27

Because Jesus goes to the Father, the Father will give us another Advocate; the Spirit; to teach, to remind.

The Pentecost event presents a spectacular vision, and produced equally spectacular results. But what does that experience for the disciples mean to you and me? Actually, everything!

The passage from John's Gospel happens at the Last Supper, when Jesus told his disciples that he would leave them soon, they could not go with him, but they would see him again. Philip seems to stumble through finding some meaning to whatever Jesus was talking about; "If you could just show us God, then whatever is going to happen can happen." Then Jesus explained the unique way that he would continue to be present to the faith community after he left the earth. He would be "present" by having the Father provide for them "another Advocate". By their continuing to live the life he had taught them, his work in the world would be continued by those who believe in him; they would be taught and reminded, energized and empowered, by his Spirit living in them.

Then from Acts we read the account of the Advocate's arrival. There was a huge crowd, and among them, NO ONE was left without a share of God's gift of new life through the Spirit. Every disciple was touched and anointed by the Spirit, and every other person present was offered new life through the witnessing that happened in their native languages, and by Peter's witness that they were seeing the work of God's Spirit.

Peter made clear that if anyone was drunk, it was not from new wine, but from God's own Spirit being poured out on all of them. Peter explained that God's purpose in doing this was for the Spirit to bring new life to the world.

Let's take a few minutes to hear what has been said through the centuries about what this means that the Spirit of Jesus is now living in his Body the Church:

Irenaeus (175 AD, Oration 31) The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and strength, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of God came down upon the Lord, and the Lord in turn gave this Spirit to his Church, sending the Advocate from heaven into all the world.

From Exposition of the 150 Fathers at Constantinople, (381 AD) I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of Life, who proceeds from the Father, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. This doesn't describe our faith, but our dogma. Here are statements of our faith...

Gregory of Nazianzus (380 AD) The Old Testament preached the Father openly and the Son more obscurely, while the New (Testament) revealed the Son and hinted at the deity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit dwells in us and reveals himself more clearly to us.

Matthew L. Skinner (Professor of New Testament, Luther Seminary, 8/12/2011) Sunday's Pentecost observances are more than a celebration of the past. They are not merely an end to Easter or a chance to launch summer programming. They are not opportunities for stoking nostalgia about the church's supposed glory days. Who needs those? Pentecost is an invitation to

dream. For when a community of faith quits dreaming dreams, it has little to offer either its members or the wider world.

Like any good dream, these dreams involve adopting a new perspective on what's possible, rousing our creativity to free us from conventional expectations. They help us see that maybe what we thought was outlandish actually lies within reach. Maybe I can find freedom from what binds me. Maybe there can be justice. Maybe I can make a difference. Maybe a person's value isn't determined by her income. Maybe the future of our economy or our society or our planet is not yet determined. Maybe God is here with me, even if my current struggles never go away.

[Anthony de Mello](#) (Indian Jesuit priest, 'Contact with God', 2003) The greatest need of the Church today is not new legislation, new theology, new structures, new liturgies— all these without the Holy Spirit are like a dead body without a soul. We desperately need someone to take away our hearts of stone and give us a heart of flesh; we need an infusion of enthusiasm and inspiration and courage and spiritual strength. We need to persevere in our love without discouragement or cynicism ... with new faith in the future. In other words, we need a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

We have seen this cycle from dogma to deeply felt heart faith, in Martin Luther – who challenged the Catholic Church; in Count Zinzendorf who challenged the Lutheran Church and began the Moravian Church; and in John and Charles Wesley, who challenged the Church of England, and planted the seed for the Methodist Church.

At Pentecost, God's very own Spirit was poured out on ALL of the hundred or so people who were gathered; and that anointing has spread to one billion people on the planet today. But of that billion people, how many have recognized, and invited, and celebrated the presence of the Holy Spirit living IN them? How many allow to be felt within them what Nicolas Zinzendorf named, "theology of the heart"?

Our Collect today started with the words, "O God, who on this day taught the hearts of your faithful people by sending to them the light of your Holy Spirit..." Our celebration of Pentecost Day is to be a celebration from the heart. And the faith Jesus brought to us is meant to transform our heart of stone into one of flesh; a heart filled with a passion for our Christ.

God the Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus in the world here and now, brought to live in us, guiding our own spirit with His Spirit, to inspire and excite us about what it means to be the Body of Christ in the world.

The anointing of the disciples with the Holy Spirit certainly has meaning for us today, because that outpouring brings with it the power to change OUR faith from being only 'head-faith', to being 'heart-faith'. And when we allow our hearts to be filled with passion for our Christ, we have accepted God's invitation to dream. This adds for me a new level of meaning to Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." My strength comes from Christ, whose Spirit I welcome to live and work in me and through me.

Ours is not a faith to maintain, but to transform;

Ours is not a faith to stay comfortable, but to be challenged;

Ours is not a faith to lull us, but to give us dreams of what is possible with God.

Come, Holy Spirit. Amen.

## NOTES:

David Thompson (current pastor, Texas Corners Bible Church, Kalamazoo, Mich) David Thompson has told the story of a family of four on a vacation camping trip. The sky was dark as deepest India ink. The night air was cool. The family gathered around a blazing, crackling campfire. The burning embers were alive with heat and light—on this perfect vacation evening.

The mother told her young son and daughter (who were less than excited about having to go to church the next day): “Each of you take your marshmallow stick. Pull one of the embers out and leave it at the edge of the fire. Then just sit still and watch it awhile.”

As they watched their burning embers, the daughter noticed that they began to change. From a brilliant, glowing yellow-white, they turned to deep, dark orange ... then to dull red. The “pulled out” embers were dying.

She could see that the glowing, burning embers in the midst of the fire were still dancing with heat and vibrancy. But the lonely embers sitting on the edge of the fire were losing their color—their light and life.

“This fire is like the Church,” explained the mother. “The burning embers are like each one of us. When we gather together in community, we glow with fire and life, like all the embers in the middle of the fire. But when we are pulled apart, we start to fade, and, individually, to die.”

Alternately, within the Body—what happens to us when we are truly grasped by the Spirit? Tongues? Miracles? Varieties of gifts to uphold the Church in truth? In a word: Yes.

But as John Wesley pointed out, “There is an irreconcilable variability in the operation of the Holy Spirit on [different] souls. ... Many find him rushing upon them like a torrent, while they experience ‘the o’erwhelming power of saving grace.’ This has been the experience of many. But in others he works in a very different way: ‘He deigns his influence to infuse,/Sweet, refreshing, as the silent dews.’ It has pleased him to work the latter way in you from the beginning, and it is not improbable he will continue (as he has begun) to working a gentle and almost insensible manner.

“Let him take his own way. He is wiser than you; he will do all things well. Do not reason against him, but let the prayer of your heart be, ‘Mold as thou will thy passive clay.’”