



SUNDAY SERMON

The Feast of Pentecost

Come, Holy Spirit, our souls inspire. Fill us with your celestial fire.

On Easter morning we joined the women, faced the empty tomb, and asked the question, now what? Fifty days later on the feast of Pentecost, that question again presents itself, now what?

Most recently, the disciples and crowds had been obedient to the instruction of the risen Christ when he said to them, stay in the city until the Spirit comes. Then he left them. They stayed; they waited. Today, as they were gathered together in one place, a sound came from heaven, the rush of a mighty wind, divided tongues of fire rested on each. Filled with the Holy Spirit they began to speak in other languages. Now what?

I suspect "now what?" crossed the hearts, minds, and lips of those first disciples on more than one occasion – as I suspect has been true for each of us in our lives with Christ. Take note, there may be a pattern here.

Fishermen minding their own business, approached by Jesus who invited, or did he command? "follow me!" Invite, command, either way, 'twas irresistible so off they trotted, leaving behind family, work, friends. Now what... have I gotten myself into? So unexpected. Leaving what I know, seeking I know not what. In towns and villages, witness with awe the power of the rabbi who touched, healed, fed, wept, who broke every rule yet spoke truth, emanated love, and gave dignity to all. Did Christ somehow beckon you to follow, touch and move you?

We crucified him, of course. It was all too much. The triumphal journey crashed in fear; our need to control. Once again, from within the cowering clutch of disciples came the inevitable, "now what?" Next the resurrection, the risen Christ present among them. Then again he left, ascended into heaven, but not before promising the coming of the Spirit. Which brings us to today.

Before we look more closely at this day of Pentecost, and in order to understand it more fully, let's take a peak at upcoming episodes. For as the past informs the present, so, too, does the future. It's important to know that from this point on, the disciples – with fits, starts, and miraculous power – will become the church. Those who followed in wonder now will lead in the power of the Spirit. It will be these disciples – an ever-expanding circle of women, men, young and old, who will pray, gather in community, through whom the Spirit will breathe that they may love God, love neighbor, share all they possess, sacrifice their lives, go to regions beyond, tend the sick, feed the hungry, baptize Jew, Gentile, and anyone else. Which is marvelous – but not easy.

In this moment, two things occur with the coming of the Spirit. First, a gift of translation; each one could understand the other, even as each spoke in her or his own language.

Continued

DATE

The Day of Pentecost:
Whitsunday
Sunday, May 20, 2018

PREACHER

The Rev. Ledlie Laughlin

VERSE

Acts 2.1-21

I wonder how that would be for us today, when so often our speaking is at cross-purposes? What a gift: if they spoke and we understood; if we spoke and they understood. It happens now and again; it happened to me last week; I was listening to someone with whom I had presumed we'd find very little common ground. But as she spoke, I heard the truth in her words, and was glad. Maybe it happened yesterday morning at St. George's Castle in Windsor when our own Presiding Bishop spoke of the redemptive power of God's love in ways that could stir the hearts and lives of all who heard – revealing a common lineage, as if – said Bishop Curry – we were all family.

The second gift of this moment is that of imagining a new future. The Pentecost people are blessed with a vision, not unlike that given to the prophets of old: your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your young men shall see visions; your old men shall dream dreams. With the gift of the Spirit, we are not bound by the limits of the present circumstances; God gives us hopes and dreams of a better world.

In my lifetime, I can think of no clearer expressions of this than Dr. King in this land and Archbishop Desmond Tutu offering a picture of an apartheid-free South Africa. The vision each articulated was so compelling that people the world over were drawn in to bring it about. I've seen similar expression on much smaller local scale – little groups of people striving to make a difference. Have you received, heard, shared a vision of God's world?

Each time, we tap into an eternal truth given new form in a new day. The Pentecost story is our story. Like the disciples before us, we've each heard something of a call, been beckoned by Jesus' teaching or touched by the holy. We've been through times when God was nowhere to be found; and, surprised by joy, discovered and used the gifts God gave us – with eagerness. So, too, we've known the Pentecost when some new truth was spoken in an unexpected voice, or a dream, a vision, came to us, of a better way, a better world. Empowered, inspired, off we went to do what we could do.

Each experience of "now what?" creates a momentary opening in our lives to a previously unseen future animated by the Holy Spirit, affirming, in effect, God's the one behind all this; we're in God's hands, God's love. The particular moment of Pentecost is that moment when, instead of following and waiting obediently for the teacher to show us the way, we speak and hear the truth in one another, we see the vision afresh, we trust the gifts already given to us, we step to the fore, and we embody the love of God.

This is not an easy path; those disciples did not join hands, sing kum-bye-yah, and go dancing off into the sunset or live happily ever after. Neither were their differences and divisions resolved once for all. But they were empowered, literally in-spired, to receive the vision and do what they could to make that vision a reality. They pooled their resources and shared what they had with those who had not. They found among themselves teachers and caretakers, organizers and healers; each employed the gift they had. Some gave up and fell away; most – filled with zeal – shared the love of God with all their heart; many gave their lives, martyred in that pursuit.

Says professor David Lose, "The Spirit doesn't solve our problems, but invites us to see possibilities we would not have seen otherwise. Rather than remove our fear, the Spirit grants us courage to move forward. Rather than promise safety, the Spirit promises God's presence. Rather than remove us from a turbulent world, or even settle the turbulence, the Spirit enables us to keep our footing amid the tremors." The Spirit brings gifts. Those gifts come at a cost.

The service of Holy Baptism concludes with an invocation that is both blessing and charge. It will be prayed over all who are baptized at our services this morning. But now, let me send you forth with this same blessing and charge. Let us pray.

Sustain these, your people, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give to each of them an inquiring and discerning heart, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and to love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen.