

Pentecost, 5/31/09

The feast of Pentecost is celebrated today with images of rushing wind, tongues of flame, and with the breaking down of language barriers to receive the message of the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit. The Romans passage uses the metaphor of birth to describe the infant church awaiting guidance of the Spirit, while making the transition from old ways to a new life in Christ. John introduces the Advocate, or Spirit of Truth, as the guide for those who follow Christ. The psalm proclaims that all creation rejoices at the touch of God's hand. At Pentecost, the mission of the church is to reach out to the world with the love of Christ.

"The Breath of Life"

Let us Pray - O God, light of the minds that know you, life of the souls that love you, and strength of the thoughts that seek you - bless the words of my lips and the meditations of our hearts. Breath your life into us that we may live in the manner you have appointed unto us and better love and serve you and one another. Amen

The disciples of Jesus experienced - fifty days after his departure, a radical change in their lives. They started - after the fire and the wind touched them and entered them to do things that they had never done before, and, I'm quite sure, things they thought they could never do!

They were made new creatures - brought to life - in a new way - much as the bones in the valley of dry bones received new life in the sight of the prophet Ezekiel.

The Spirit of God - that breath that proceeds from the Father and the Son - creates and makes all things new - it makes them all that God intended them to be.

The Day of Pentecost ushered in a new age, the age of the Spirit - the age of new life - for all people.

We often hear about beginning new eras and new periods in human life.

Every time a new region in Africa gets piped water, or every time a new power plant is built anywhere that had no power before, an important official will address the people and speak of a new era, a new start, a new creation, a new century.

But in fact human life in its relationships goes on as it has before. The only difference is that the quarrels at home, the fights in the bars, the deceptive talk, and the selfish grabbing of stuff is now done in fluorescent light of multiple shades while drinking clean water via the Cullighan Man.

Real human newness cannot be a building, a power plant, a landing on the moon, a flight to Mars, nor can it be a psychological theory, a sociological paradigm, a new Ipod or Blackberry, nor even a new set of laws or a more rigorous enforcement of the old.

You cannot change the quarrels in a family by eating better food, by installing a large screen TV or by buying a bigger car.

A real evolutionary step can only be made if mentalities and attitudes change; real progress can only be made if outlooks and judgments change.

That is what happened at the moment that the Spirit of God

descended, at the moment that all the disciples of Jesus became not only capable of speaking all kinds of languages, but were willing to use those languages to contact people they never would have thought of addressing before.

It happened when they went from believing in forgiveness to showing forgiveness; it happened when they went from believing that God would protect them to actually venturing forth from the upper room into the danger filled streets of Jerusalem.

It happened when they went from thinking about what Jesus had said, to proclaiming what he did say - in word - and in action, and reaching out to heal, to serve - and to love - all those around them.

For there is a mysterious moment in our all of lives
- a moment when belief comes alive.
- a moment when our thinking about the promises that God has made becomes in us a transforming faith.
- a moment when ideas and concepts suddenly move our minds and our hearts, and through these, move our feet and our hands, our mouths and our lips in a new and a life giving way.

That moment is the gift of the Holy Spirit. That moment is the fruit of the Holy that seeks to bring us closer to God - and closer to one another. In our tradition, this moment is called Justification; the on-going relationship, Sanctification.

For the first disciples that moment happened with a rush of wind and tongues like fire - and it still happens that way for some people.

For John Wesley - the founder of our Methodism - it came when he was listening to Martin Luther's Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Romans, and he felt his heart "strangely warmed".

For me it came in the warm wind of summer in an open field when I was barely old enough to comprehend the moment.

For still others - it comes in other ways - and as with the first disciples, as with John Wesley, and even as with me - it changes their lives. It takes us from the ordinary, making our lives, holy.

It changes it like the air changed the balloon I used in the children's time (at Lake Pleasant) last Sunday. It gives life to the form and substance, to the bones and sinews -- life to the heart and soul. It is the evidence, as Paul writes - it is the sign and it is the seal - of our relationship with God.

God's gift took me from having belief in God - to having God's power in me.

And while I can stifle that power within me for a time, or even for a season; while I can turn from it and conceal it for a while, I can no longer escape it.

It is there - and I know it.

And it struggles within me for expression - and when I let go - when I let God within me - when I let the Spirit within me - beautiful things happen.

Indeed the Spirit does all that Jesus said it would do.

It brings to mind the words of God - the words we sometimes try to forget and the words that we sometimes look for - and suddenly have;

- those words that allow us to bring real comfort to a

friend who is lost.

- those words that allow us really communicate forgiveness and love to someone in need.
- those words that convict - and encourage - and at last - when surrendered to, bring peace to the soul, my soul - and the soul of others.

The Spirit flows in us, and through us it flows to others.

It is like the wind,

it is like the gentle flapping of a dove's wings

It is like fire,

It is like a river.

It is like a still small voice with.

It is the urge and the sigh of contentment.

And this my friends is the age we are in, the new age that was born on the day of Pentecost, an age that allows for a true transformation, for a new way of living.

It allows for it - it makes it happen - it brings it to reality and all we have to do to enter that age is to reach out for it.

Jesus cried out: "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink."

When we drink, when we turn to God; when we believe and seek him in prayer, in church, in the world around us, he comes -- he comes in the Spirit - and he honors all his word unto us, -- he works a new work in us and through us he works in others, he works to establish his kingdom fully upon the earth - as it is in heaven.

"As the scripture has said", repeated Jesus, "'Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

That Breath of Life moves because God makes it so.

He makes it so through the gift of Pentecost - the gift of his Spirit... Praise be to God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
Amen.

PROFESSION OF FAITH: A NEW CREED

We are not alone, we live in God's world.

We believe in God: who has created and is creating,
who has come in Jesus, the Word made flesh,
to reconcile and make us new,
who works in us and others by the Spirit.

We trust in God.

We are called to be the Church,
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in creation
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our Judge and our Hope.

In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us.

We are not alone. Thanks be to God.

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