

Reflection for Sunday, June 5, 2022

Pentecost

Today is Pentecost. In this season, we follow the followers of Jesus as they become the church. In the fire and wind of Pentecost, the Spirit came among them as irrepressible life, and suddenly the disciples' experience with Jesus was inspired with new meaning – Jesus' mission was their mission now! Now they were to go to the world as apostles, a title which means "those sent out." As they went, they told how Jesus taught them to live every moment attentive to loving God and humankind. Fired by the Spirit – we focus on living the Christ-life together in ways that express God's yearning for the transformation of human life and societies. Pentecost is vibrant, communal, and active!

The setting – after the ascension. Jews from all over the known world have gathered for the Jewish festival of Pentecost (a harvest festival – "first fruits"). Jesus has gone, and the smart thing, the practical thing to do would have been to disperse, go their own ways, mind their own business, maybe even go back to their old lives. But each of them has done a radical thing. The followers of Jesus are gathered, waiting in the upper room, as instructed by Jesus. Waiting for what comes next. I wonder what they were feeling.

(Lectio Divina – Acts 2:1-21)

This passage contains so many important teachings on the nature and role of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is kind of mysterious. We have so many names and roles, and yet none completely encapsulates the Spirit:

Holy	Advocate	Wisdom
Sustainer	Paraclete	Truth
Ruach	Breath of God	Inspiration
Guide	One who gives aid	Accompanier
Lodestar	One who empowers....	

[Aside – I think it is important to remember that the Spirit is often referred to in the feminine. The only part of the Trinity that has that distinction. I wonder how it influences your understanding of God?]

There are two aspects of today's passage caught my attention:

- 1.) The **power** of the Holy Spirit - "amazed and astonished" (v.7)
- 2.) **Inclusivity** - "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh" (v.17) (community)

Amazed & Astonished

We should not underestimate the Spirit's power – we cannot domesticate it or contain it. It leaves people amazed and astonished (and often bewildered, as well).

Barbara A Holmes (Work of the People) talks about the release of the fire. There is power and energy in fire, and in wind. Both are hard to control, they do what they want and go where they will. They move. She talks about the Divine Spark in all of us. It is always lit, maybe not always at a high, high level, but it is there. You cannot put out God's Divine Spark. You can cover it up with a lot of other stuff. You can allow suffering to dim it. But it is always there. We just need to stop, take that life-giving breath, and say, "We are willing to be set on fire!"

The Holy Spirit is this amazing, creating, empowering force. The gift of the Spirit being poured out means **possibilities**. We are slowly coming out a pandemic, we have new ministry staff starting this summer. It is a great time to ask ourselves what divine spark God has poured out in our church? What is being set in motion? Where is the Spirit blowing us?

The people were amazed and astonished by what the Spirit had done in that room. But this was not just a one-time historical event. God's creating Spirit continues to breathe life into us, both as individuals and as a church. I wonder what amazes and astonishes people about the witness of the church today? What should we be doing, that would make people be amazed and astonished? It is not being hypocrites, it is not taking care of only ourselves, it is not being judgmental, it is not spewing hate. A few weeks ago, we talked about how the world will know who we are as Christians by our love. How are we as a community of faith loving the world in such a way that it astonishes and amazes others?

Inclusivity

"they were all together in one place" (v.1)

"All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit" (v.4)

"every nation" (v. 5)

"All were amazed and perplexed" (v.12)

"I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...sons and daughters...old and young...slaves (both men and women)" (v.17, 18)

"Everyone" (v. 21)

It is so important to me that my God is an inclusive one – that my God loves and cares for everyone, no matter their nationality, or gender, or age, or economic status. We humans seem to miss the mark on this so often, both as individuals and collectively. Pentecost represents the inbreaking of God's purposes for all humanity bringing humanity together in understanding, despite our differences.

The followers of Jesus, this community that comes into being on Pentecost, are trying to figure out who they were, what practices and beliefs define them, who is allowed in and who is not. Luke, the author of Acts, shows us that everyone is to be included. The church is not a building, it is not even a particular membership or group of people. The church is here for God's mission and movement in the world.

I wonder what barriers we put up (consciously or unconsciously) to people believing that they are welcome to be part of this community of faith at Cordova Bay?

This Pentecost moment is a **communal** one. It happens to everyone. The Spirit does work in specific and often striking ways in particular individuals, but today's passage also reminds us that the Spirit also is vitally involved in the very fabric of the Christian community as one who helps it remember and hold to the core understandings and principles of Jesus' instruction, and work out and apply how these should shape thought and action in each new circumstance encountered – God's kingdom woven into our daily living.

Luke shows the church as a diverse, prophetic community of bridge-builders, visionaries, and dreamers, male and female, young and old, free and slave. This inclusive picture vibrates so well with the beginning of Pride Month. I think it is so important for our church to be visibly affirming. It is important because of all the hate that people of the LGBTQ+ and Two Spirited Community have heard from other churches. Today's scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit is poured out on *everyone* – full stop, no exclusions. Everyone is a beloved child of God, filled with that divine spark, just waiting to be ignited.

For Luke, the Spirit brings life, renewal, and restoration, sometimes in sudden, disruptive fashion: hubris transformed into humility, fragmentation into community. However, Pentecost is only the beginning! Again and again, the Spirit mobilizes the church and opens up new horizons for our participation in God's movement in and work in the world.

Breath means new life – and new life means new growth, change, and ongoing development. The Spirit gathers and protects, but also opens and challenges, provoking and pushing us along. Can you hear her calling, "Let's go!"?

The church's mission, God's mission, is the adventurous challenge of understanding and connecting with neighbours – loving them. To celebrate and serve with Spirit's wind in our sails. In an age of polarizing fear and division (over gun violence, abortion, politics, and so much more), the church's mission – the essence of Pentecost – has never been more pressing.

God is an Act

God is not a guy out there somewhere,
not a thing, but energy,
the energy of love,
the love that makes being be,
not a being,
but being itself, "I AM."
I BE, being.
God is an act.
An act of love,
since that's what love is:
not a feeling, but an act,
even if it's an invisible act
of regard.
When you love someone,
even poorly,
God is.
The more you love
the more God you make happen.
This is the mystery of the Holy Spirit,
that it is given to us to make real.
The fire burns in us,
even when we don't know it.

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