

PENTECOST 2010

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:26-36; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-27

Well, happy birthday to us!

Traditionally, today, Pentecost, marks the beginning of the church. That is why we have all these red balloons *up front today*

It is a day of celebration, and a little awe that after the resurrection and ascension God finds this new way to be manifest among us.

The disciples are filled with the Spirit and for at least one moment people hear and understand. The disciples are filled with the Spirit and suddenly have the courage to do the preaching, teaching, and healing that created the Body of Christ, known as the Church.

Since Easter we have been listening to the stories in the Book of Acts of the early church. These all happen after the story we heard today. Peter, who never quite got his sentences straight, becomes a central leader. John, who was known for acting a little too impetuously, becomes a consistent figure. After Pentecost, they have clarity and right courage. —

The work and vision that makes us the church — here, and now, this Sunday, — has begun.

But, of course, the power of the Spirit doesn't begin here. And if we take today to explore what it may indeed mean to have the Spirit acting in our life, we first need to remember that same Spirit has been acting since the beginning. When God calls forth for creation, it is the "wind" or "spirit" from God that sweeps over all — a fact we are reminded of in today's Psalm. "You send forth your Spirit, and they are created; and so you renew the face of the earth." [Ps.104:31]

Powerful words — "created," "renew." So is this what the Spirit is about? And how does an understanding of this strengthen our life in Christ, the life of the church? It is often useful as Christians to begin with the Gospel, so let's begin with our Gospel for today.

In the Gospel we just heard, Jesus is speaking to his disciples on the eve of his death of the Spirit who will come to them as Paraclete or Advocate —the one who will speak to them on Jesus' behalf enabling them to testify to all that they have learned of him — the Spirit who is sent by Jesus from the Father to convince the world of its sinful nature and of the truth of Jesus' teaching and the good news that through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ the tyranny of sin is broken. The Spirit will also be their guide and mentor, their teacher who will speak to their very hearts of that which Jesus would have them know. Another word sometimes used to translate the greek *paraclete* is "the Comforter" or helper. The Spirit is there along side us and with us in impossible times.

To return to the account of the day of Pentecost in Acts— the story begins in the Upper room, presumably the same place in which the disciples had been gathering through the whole Easter period, to pray and to wait as Jesus had instructed them for the promise of the Father. Perhaps they were still in some sense hiding from the authorities, unsure of what they were to do and then suddenly the great wind of the Spirit and the tongues of fire — sure signs of the presence of God among them — transforms these fearful fugitives into bold public witnesses. They spill out onto the streets of Jerusalem.

As one commentator puts it.

After what's been done to Jesus, you'd have to be either crazy or drunk to be shouting his name in the streets and pointing accusing fingers at the executioners. The disciples are neither, but what they have to say has an

immediate and far-ranging impact. For the witnesses to this event are people from all over the empire who have come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks, and each of them hears the message of the disciples concerning the powerful works of God in his or her own tongue. The Holy Spirit breaks down the barriers of nation and culture.

And consider the messengers. Here we have rude uncultured Galileans speaking to cosmopolitan visitors of high standing — people who can afford to travel from the four corners of the empire to Jerusalem. The Spirit breaks down the barriers of class.

Not only that. As Peter begins to address the crowd it is clear that women as well as men are present. He chooses the prophet Joel as his text “in the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh and your sons and daughters will prophecy” The Spirit abolishes the barrier of gender.

Here in Acts chapter 2 we are given a clear picture of the universal character of the church on the very first day of its existence. Peter declares that Jesus has come as the promised lord and messiah but has been killed at the behest of the leaders of the people. He invites his hearers to transfer their allegiance from executioners to victim. — A dangerous message indeed in a situation where the Jewish nation was firmly under the boot of Caesar’s lordship and all messianic movements were suspect by both the Romans and the Judean authorities.

Yet in response to Peter’s teaching three thousand people on that day of Pentecost came to faith in Jesus, and were welcomed into the community. By the end of the day the house which had been a hiding place for fugitives has been transformed into a fellowship in which resources are freely shared — a place in which jubilee economics are celebrated. The Spirit’s presence transforms the whole of life — inwardly and outwardly, private and public.

And that can be true for us too. If we allow the Spirit to sweep through our lives, disturbing and disrupting, transforming us inwardly and outwardly, so that we too can become a community in which all the barriers that might otherwise separate us are broken down and we become fully aware of the breadth and length and depth of God's love shown forth in Christ and come to celebrate and share in the freedom and the wholeness and the joy which God intends for us and for all people in Christ.

But we must be willing for that to happen.

I believe that we, like the disciples who met together in that upper room, need to pray that we will indeed be filled with the Holy Spirit.

And so I would ask you to join with me in praying:

**Holy Spirit, come among us here
as you came among the disciples gathered on Pentecost.
Fill us and transform us
Renew us and empower us,
grant us wisdom and strength
work and act in our midst.
and through our own words and deeds
that we may glorify and praise God our Creator, Redeemer and
Sanctifier,
in all that we are and all that we do. Amen.**