

Sermon
Day of Pentecost
May 23, 2021
St. Andrew's, Methuen
William Bradbury

Acts 2:1-21
Psalm 104:25-35, 37
Romans 8:22-27
John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Let's be honest: if we don't have some fear of the Holy Spirit, we're not paying attention to what Holy Spirit is and does in human beings. There was a lot of fear of Holy Spirit in the Episcopal Church in Atlanta in the late 1960s. Most wanted no part of the Charismatic renewal shaking ours and the Roman Catholic Churches.

Some Episcopalians across the land embraced this move of the Spirit while others rose up to resist this movement—often in the same congregation—which meant many churches split right down the middle.

I've been on both sides of this struggle at different times and know the virtue of both traditional and Spirit-filled faith. But as I ponder Peter's speech, what I see now is this Traditionalist-Pentecostal split is "A **red herring**", **that** misleads and distracts us from what truly matters.

While we were fighting in 1969 about how to worship on Sunday mornings, we didn't have to worry about our bigotry and white privilege; we didn't have to ask questions like, "why are we living on the rich side of Atlanta going to great schools and people of color live on the poor side of town and go to terrible schools? And why in the world are we fighting a devastating, unwinnable, war in Southeast Asia?"

Yeah, it's a lot easier to argue about worship than the real suffering of real people! **It's also a lot easier to inhabit a church filled with our spirit than a church aflame with God's Spirit.**

Further, if church members are fighting over styles of music—do we use the organ or guitars—and fighting over how we use our hands—do we raise them in praise or keep them folded in prayer, **then the church doesn't have to face what is the really scary thing about the experience of Holy Spirit.**

So, what is the really scary thing about Holy Spirit?

What scares as individuals is having Holy Spirit on the inside of one's life, in one's soul and spirit. Most of us grew up in a worldview in which God is a being outside the self: We pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven..." to a God far away. This God gave us the 10 Commandments and this God rewards us when we keep them and punishes us when we don't. This God justifies our hatred of those who don't look and think like we do.

We go to church on Sundays to let this God know we're paying attention and doing our best. We like the Book of Common Prayer, printed in permanent ink, because it saves us from having to be spontaneous. Visiting this God once a week or at least once a month isn't too onerous for such busy people as ourselves and it keeps us in God's good graces.

But just look at what happens when such a distant view of God is replaced by Holy Spirit:

"And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind...and divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a **tongue rested on each one of them**. Each individual of the 120 followers of Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."

As Peter says, this fulfills the vision of the Prophet Joel who said: "God declares,

that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
and your young men shall see visions,
and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
and they shall prophesy."

Who in their right mind wants Holy Spirit on the inside giving us visions, dreams, and spontaneous praying?

But wait there's more to be afraid of!

Because under the impact of the Spirit on each member, the church becomes a community responsive to Spirit that is willing to co-create here and now the Realm of God for all people.

This is the point of that list of nations: "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs."

When I was in fourth grade one of the worst things you could call someone was a Cretan: to us a Cretan was an ignoramus, a blockhead.

And this story includes Arabs? That means we must love Arabs, Palestinians and Israelis and work for justice and peace in the Middle East, not just for some but for all.

 So on the day of Pentecost the 120 disciples are not encountered on the outside by a divine being with more laws, but they are encountered on the inside by Jesus's Spirit. All they can do is say "Yes, I'm open to Spirit", or say, "No, I'm closed to Spirit cause these people seem drunk."

In that moment Holy Spirit transforms an inward-looking tribe into an outward-looking community that believes Paul when he says, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. ²⁸ There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Holy Spirit is not a thing outside our life, but Divine Presence inside our life loving God and serving our neighbor AS US.

What is required of us to live in Spirit is not keeping the Law or playing at being a conventional church.

What is required is the willingness to welcome Holy Spirit **to transform our consciousness into the Mind of Christ, so that we naturally pray deeply—sometimes in groanings too deep for utterance—and naturally serve our broken world sacrificially.**

Prayer and Service is how Holy Spirit works through us, as us.

Many Episcopal Churches after years of sitting on the sidelines of injustice, maned-up and worked hard to create justice and peace. But now those who got burned-out working in the streets are learning how to connect with Holy Spirit in prayer.

Thirty years ago Franciscan Richard Rohr founded the **Center for Action and Contemplation** in Albuquerque, New Mexico to help burned out activists access the springs of living water flowing out of their wounded hearts.

I've heard him say many times that the most important word in the name of his center is the word **"and"**. **It is the Center for Action AND Contemplation, because on the Day of Pentecost Holy Spirit gives to followers of Jesus his vision of one new humanity AND his**

experience of deep prayer. Jesus's Vision and Prayer taken together lifts us out of conventional mind into the Mind of Christ.

May it be so for us who are also possessed by Holy Spirit.