

Pentecost Sunday
May 15, 2016
The Rev. Denise Trogdon

Conspiring with the Spirit

Lord, take our eyes and see through them, take our lips and speak through them, take our hearts and fill them with your fire, Amen.

If you have been to a Pentecost service before you were probably not surprised when during the first reading people stood up and began to speak in different languages. I'm always amazed at the power of the cacophony of voices that express the same message with such diversity. And if you heard this for the first time you may have experienced the delight and disruption that can accompany encounters with the Holy Spirit. The dramatic arrival of the Spirit on this day of Pentecost, with rushing wind and languages we can't decipher, wakes us up, disturbs us. We're reminded that something supernatural has happened and is happening in our midst. The Spirit of God who brooded over the waters of creation, the very breath of life, has come to dwell in our hearts.

In Jerusalem, devout Jews gathered to celebrate the Festival of Weeks observed fifty days after Passover. They gave a "first fruits" offering of the harvest, commemorating the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai. On this day, God appeared in a tsunami of unbridled power, transforming hearts and lives.

The disciples of Jesus were still reeling from their loss. Terror and despair at Jesus' death, exuberance at his resurrection and the bittersweet goodbyes of his ascension left them exhausted and discouraged. Their vision and hope seemed a distant memory with Jesus' physical absence. His promise of an advocate, one who would guide their journey appeared empty as they remained behind locked doors. How could they continue Jesus' mission without the presence of the one who inspired them?

Suddenly there came a sound of rushing wind, "Ruach", the Spirit of God that blew through the doors and cleared the dust of uncertainty. Energy and fire filled them with courage and renewed hope. Overflowing with animation they proclaimed God's redeeming love with words that were not their own. Crowds gathered as they heard these words in their own languages. Could this be the very Spirit Jesus had promised? Peter used the words spoken by the prophet Joel, "God declared, I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." God's creative Spirit breathed new life into their dry bones.

That band of dispirited disciples planning to return to their days of fishing was now compelled to speak the good news to all who would hear. The event of Pentecost inspired a hope that broke through barriers that divided their community, and three thousand came forward to be baptized that day. This marked the day the church was born.

The story of our beginnings is dramatic and full of passion, bearing little resemblance to what many people experience when they go to church today. In the name of tradition, formal rituals and rote prayers can take up residence in our worship. Sometimes it is hard to detect that life-

giving energy that was offered as a gift of the Spirit. When we lose sight of the fire that dwells within us, our smoldering faith just waits to be kindled.

Author and poet Annie Dillard wrote this about the Christian community: “On the whole, I do not find Christians sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It is madness to wear ladies straw hats to church. We should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares, they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping God make wake someday and take offense, or the waking God may draw us out to where we can never return.”

For a time in my spiritual wanderings I went with a friend to a Pentecostal praise and worship, every Tuesday night. Now being a cradle Episcopalian, you can imagine my reaction to people dancing in the aisles and falling over being slain in the Spirit! The first time I visited, I wanted to run, not walk out of that worship, so foreign to anything I had known. Yet there was a sense that something in my heart had been closed off from what the Spirit offered. Crossing the divides I had constructed challenged me to see the Spirit at work in those I considered other. Liberated from our own biases we become more discerning of the Spirit within us and in others.

Now we don't have to work ourselves up into a Pentecostal frenzy to claim the gifts we have been given by the indwelling of the Spirit. To speak words of love, to reach out to one another through our divisions, and to share God's abundance with a hurting world manifests the Holy Spirit that has made a home in our hearts.

But it seems, like the disciples, the church has become discouraged. Have we lost heart, depending on our own energies? Have we locked our doors and our lives so that we only recognize the ache of something missing? We try in so many ways to fill that empty space. Following the Spirit is a scary proposition because she moves in unpredictable ways and often disrupts what we have constructed in our lives to make us feel safe. Paul reminds us in the letter to the Romans that we do not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but a spirit of adoption, confidence and courage that comes from knowing we are loved for who we are. The Holy Spirit comes alongside in moments of anxiety to encourage and equip us.

Evidence of the Holy Spirit is in the fruits of our lives in very practical ways; in more patience and gentleness of heart, more peace in our troubles and more joy in our journey. Can we reclaim what inspires us? If inspire means to breathe in, conspire means to breathe with. Can we conspire with the Spirit to reanimate God's love in us and in the world? Will we allow the stirrings of the Holy Spirit to disrupt us to new life at Holy Cross?

This morning we bring two young souls to the waters of baptism. Alexander and Theodore come before us with open hearts to receive that life giving passion. Make no mistake that on this Pentecost day they are not only baptized in water but by the fire of the Holy Spirit that kindles their hearts. If we join the conspiracy of the Holy Spirit and surround these young ones with God's love we help ignite that flame in them to do God's work.

We are a resurrection people who live in the power of the Pentecost event. The work of the Holy Spirit comes alive in our midst as we respond to the invitation. The Holy Spirit comes as comforter, encourager, and disturber, convicting and compelling us into situations that need

God's love. Comforted or afflicted an encounter with God's Holy Spirit changes us. Give thanks, for our source of inspiration, the Spirit of God, the very breath of life. Come Holy Spirit. Amen.