

Pentecost Sunday/June 4, 2017

Acts 2:1-21

Rev. Joel M. Krueger

"Forecasting Holy Downpours and Spiritornados!"

This story is one that all of us should know. It is the story of the birth of the church. And as much as it tells about the character and identity of the church in those first early years right after Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension, it just as much tells us about what the church must be today!

First, a word about the name Pentecost. Pentecost was a Jewish harvest festival that took place 50 days after Passover, and thus the name, "pentecost" which means "fiftieth." We learn from Exodus that it was to be a celebration for "the feast of harvest, of the first fruits of your labor, of what you sow in the field." (Ex. 23:16) It was one of the three major festivals of the Jewish year, and so on that day, as the disciples gathered there in the upper room in Jerusalem, the city would have been filled with thousands of Jewish pilgrims, who had come from all different parts of the world to celebrate Pentecost. It was also the day that tradition said, Moses received the Law from God.

It is of course fitting, then that the Christian church also took on the name, Pentecost, as it was 50 days after Easter, after Jesus' resurrection, that this event occurred. And it was certainly in keeping with its original meaning, celebrating the first fruits of the early church's labor. For we are told later in this story, after this amazing event, the disciples took in and baptized over 3,000 people that day!

But I am always taken in by the description of what happened that day. There they were, the disciples, the 11 original apostles plus Matthias, who was chosen to replace Judas Iscariot. Then there were some other men, a number of women, and Jesus' own family. It was a big group, following Jesus' instructions that he gave them as he ascended to heaven, that they should wait for the "promise of the Father", the "baptism of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4,5), and that they were to stay in the city "until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49).

But of course, they didn't know when or how this was all going to happen. This was just another day of their waiting, more than a month since Jesus crucifixion. They had been going to the Temple each day, to worship and to pray, and to teach. Luke tells us that they shared all things in common, sold possessions and gave to those in need, that they broke bread together in their homes. So it wasn't like they weren't doing anything. They were waiting, but waiting with intention. They were preparing themselves, anticipating whatever it was that was coming, whenever it was going to come.

And on that day, that day of Pentecost, it hit them! They were all gathered there in that upper room of a house, when all of a sudden, a noise, it says it was like the rush of a mighty wind, and I figure it was like what people say it sounds like when a tornado hits. People will tell you that it sounds like a freight train barreling down upon you. That's what I envision when I read this. A great wind blowing into the house, knocking people off their feet, blowing their hair and lifting up anything that wasn't nailed down. It was a powerful wind that blew in and caught them off guard, taking their breath away, and filling them back up with some new kind of breath,

some new kind of feeling that filled them up, that gave them strength, that empowered them and gave them courage.

It took hold of them, as if possessing them, and they could see it in each other's eyes, and they could see auras above their heads, as if fire was shooting up out of them, and they were inspired and they could visibly see that each one of them was filled with this inspiration. **It was the Holy Spirit!** They realized that this, of course, was that baptism that Jesus had promised! And they felt it, and greeted it, and let it come in to them, they did not refuse it or turn away from it, as frightening and confusing as it must have been.

And they began to speak, to talk about the great news that they had experienced in Jesus. They put their heads out the windows and began to shout to all who could hear, about the mighty works of God, how they had been blessed. They couldn't help it! They were so filled with whatever this Spirit was, so inspired, that they could not contain themselves. And then they discovered that they were speaking in languages they did not know! And the people in the streets below heard them, listening to what they were saying, being so moved and amazed by what was happening.

There was such a powerful energy that entered and poured out of those first followers that it seemed to affect all who heard them. **This was the beginning of the church.** This was **the baptism of the Holy Spirit** that they were waiting for.

In seminary, I had an instructor who gave an interesting lecture on this phenomenon. He talked about it with the language of a meteorologist. He talked about **atmospheric pressure**, that there is **High pressure** and **Low pressure**. High pressure is when the air above cools and flows downward, clearing the air and is usually attributed with clear, sunny weather. Low pressure is when warm air rises, taking with it moisture, into the atmosphere, then creating clouds, leading to rain and other types of precipitation.

Then there are tornados. Tornados, are columns of air rotating dangerously fast. The air is in motion because of the difference in pressure between the center of tornado (very low pressure pulling up warm, moist air up) and the outer edge of the tornado (high pressure), concentrating all this energy into a very small compact space, and **DOWN** to the ground! It is the **confluence** of these different factors, coming together at just the right time, that creates the power unleashed in the tornado.

This, he said, was perhaps what the Holy Spirit at Pentecost was like. A confluence of different factors coming together at just the right time. The disciples' preparation: the opening of their hearts in love and generosity to one another, their sharing with one another, their praying together, braking bread and eating together, their reaching out and teaching the ways of Jesus with others, their **intentional waiting and anticipation** of something to come. That along with the **winds of change** that were blowing through the world at that particular time and place, led to this amazing movement and power of God's Holy Spirit among them.

We are living in a time of change and turmoil as well. The question is, are we preparing ourselves **to be open and available** to the Spirit of God, as those first followers of Jesus were? I, like many of you, have felt the Spirit of God at work among us, blowing through our midst.

For the past two decades or longer, church scholars and theologians have recognized that the church is undergoing a dramatic change and are awaiting to see what that will ultimately be. The world around us is in greater and greater need for the message and power of God's love to come blowing into our midst. And I can see in our own community here at First Church, signs of the Spirit's presence, in the growth of our **Sunday School** and in their planting of a garden from which to share with others, in the work of the **8 O'Clock Club** and the newly forming **Circle of Presence**, in the teams involved in the **Syria Relief** project and our engagement in the **Belfast Has Pride** event.

The Spirit of God is always with us, always present and it **cannot be controlled**, but we must **prepare** our hearts, prepare ourselves and our communities of faith. We should be **anticipating** God's Spirit with us, so that we are ready for whatever it is that God wants to **blow** into our midst, whatever God wants to **rain** down upon us.

As we share in **Christ's meal** today, and as we share in **prayer** and **fellowship** and in the **work** that we do together, may we commit ourselves and our families to the work and power of God's Holy Spirit. And may the **blessings of Pentecost** come upon us. Amen.