

Pentecost 6/4/17

"FIRE! In the Mind"

Acts 2:1-21, John 20:19-23

The Holy Spirit comes to us in many different ways, but the way we seem to like to remember it coming to the early church is the way it came to those 120 witnesses to the Ascension. PENTECOST!

First the wind came violently filling the room and with it "Divided tongues, as of FIRE, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ALL of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."

These inspired disciples made such a racket that the crowds in the street were amazed and astonished! They were from all over the Mediterranean region, immigrants and tourists,

2. faithful Jews and proselytes, each with their own language, but each hearing the raucous in their own tongue!

However, they, being human, thought the worst, and accused the disciples of being drunk; as if they were a fraternity at the University of Stroudsburg, spilling out of their Sigma Chi House onto the streets! CALL THE COPS!

Each year we dress in red and remember the birth of the church. PENTECOST. We have this kind of subdued birthday party, not really expecting a rushing wind or tongues of fire to descend on us. Those kinds of things don't really happen anymore, do they?

We are like that old man at the birthday party of his nephew where the kids were running around and laughing at the hired clown and bouncing in the blow-up jumpy contraption and spilling cake all over when asked what he

3. thought, said: 'The kids are too noisy, and being too exuberant. It's funny. When you are young, you get excited about your birthday, about life and all that is ahead of you. But as you get older, there seems to be less to get excited about. And when your birthday comes, you just get reminded of how old you are. People keep saying, happy birthday to you, but there's nothing happy about it.

Wow! That's a living parable for how the modern church views Pentecost. We view it as a noisy party from the past. We understand it. We know it is part of our history. But we would just as soon eat our cake and go home and take a nap! To get that carried away again would take more energy, enthusiasm, and hope than we possess. In our condition, we have to be careful not to get carried away.

We seem to want just enough religion to be comfortable, (assuage our fear of hell and

4. affirm our place in heaven). We want to be respected, to feel good about ourselves, but not have so much religion that it shakes up our routines and changes our way of living. We want the benefits of the Holy Spirit without having to experience too much of the Spirit.

In other words, we want to retain control. The only way to do that is to stop breathing. Hold your breath until God relents. Until God gives in like some frustrated father whose child has decided to hold his breath until he gets his own way. Just refuse to accept the gift of the Holy Spirit.

It really is that simple. God refuses to force us to do anything we don't desire. Remember Jesus entered the upper room that was locked because the disciples were afraid. (This is a symbol for our minds that make a reality out of our feelings and ignore the rational promises of God. We lock our minds to any reason that

5. might come from God, and say God's reasoning is utterly unreasonable. How can Jesus be raised from the dead? How can he get into our locked rooms and minds?) The first words from the mouth of Jesus were, "Peace be with you". Jesus speaks to our fears and then shows them his hands and side. I feel that this is Christ's way of saying, "I am like you. I bleed when I am cut, I cry when I am sad, I plead with God when I am afraid and still God raised me and still I come to you who ran away when I was crucified. I come to you who denied me. I come to you who screwed up and to you who feel powerless and are scared."

He didn't say, "I love you." "I forgive you." "Let's start over." He didn't start a dialogue with them to convince them that he was indeed the risen Christ and not an apparition or doppelganger. He said, "Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I send you."

6.

He enters the locked minds of these scared disciples who had no idea what the future held. They were ashamed, discouraged, probably contentious; blaming one another for their failures. (Remember, they didn't get along all that well when Jesus was with them in the flesh. James and John asked Jesus to sit at his right and left when he came to power. They knew Judas was stealing from the common purse, but never confronted him. They continually misread the mind of Jesus and had to be corrected. But they also seemed to be reluctant to tell Jesus what they really thought.)

Jesus takes this group of misfits and commissions them to go and continue to do what he was sent by God to do.

There is no mention of their immediate reaction, and Jesus didn't give them a chance to

7. start their incessant arguing with him or each other. He left no time for excuses.

He breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

Remember I began this message (What, Matt, 45 minutes ago?) by acknowledging that the Holy Spirit can come to us in many different ways? This "Breath of God" came not with wind and fire, but it came with Christ's peace, opening their minds to their future and their purpose for having been chosen as disciples in the first place.

Remember how I described the rushing wind and tongues of fire as being misunderstood by the world? Two things I want you to consider:

1. Waiting around for God to do something that will reverse your plight or your "Sitz im Leben" or the course this church is on, will prove futile.

8. The 120 waiters for the promise of the Angel to be fulfilled, had first witnessed the ascension of Jesus, heard together the words of the angels and followed their directions to go and wait for God to act. However, they went together, even those who doubted, having witnessed the ascension, and prayed together in one place! "All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer together with certain women." They did not separate into their own little cliques. Even those who doubted and those who were angry that Jesus, raised from the dead, went to heaven without THEM, gathered in Jerusalem and they even took the time to elect another apostle. (Seems to me that they were attempting to "Not give up and Carry on!" as if there were going to be a future. They were together displaying HOPE.) They were being obedient to the will of God, hoping against hope for a future together of



9. witnessing to the love of God who came to the world in the flesh. I guess, all they needed, was a new mindset, looking ahead rather than back, and the courage to speak out.

I can imagine them wondering how they were going to communicate the truth they had experienced with a world that was so broken and seeking relief from suffering through the age-old distractions of sex and booze and vengeance. They were trying to be obedient and supportive of one another and so were open to receiving the Holy Spirit.

They were all TOGETHER in one place!

2. When Jesus breathed on the disciples, he opened their minds to the truth that sets us free. "If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." This is witnessing to the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, until he comes.

10. Jesus was sent into the world to reveal that God is forgiving and desires a personal relationship with each of us. Jesus was sent into the world to save us from our fear of forgiving. A closed mind refuses the irrational reasoning of Jesus as being dangerous to survival and unsatisfying to the senses. That is why the Holy Spirit comes breathing on us and with tongues of fire. The wind and fire of God's love burns the doubt and fear from our minds and fills us with trust. We are loved, God is with us and in us and we can risk forgiveness, meaning we can risk vulnerable love.