

Pentecost, 5.23.2021

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; Psalm 1; 1 John 5:9-13; John 17:6-21

“Filled with the Holy Spirit”

Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

On Pentecost Sunday we celebrate with Christian churches around the world the gift of the Holy Spirit who continues to speak, revealing God’s will to us. It’s kind of funny, but Pentecost has been impervious to the kind of commercialism we see at Christmas and Easter. You probably haven’t ordered Pentecost chocolates or Holy Spirit fruit baskets. The only things I have ever seen, and it was some years ago, were fiery hot cinnamon candies packaged for Pentecost. Imagine that! Can you imagine a Pentecost inspired family dinner? Grandmother’s deviled eggs in spicy hot paprika mayo, Dad’s “tongues of fire wings” - “they’re so hot you’ll see visions and dream dreams!” Of course, for dessert there would be a Pentecost cake with tongues of fire orange and red icing!

Actually, I am glad that the festival of Pentecost flies under the cultural radar of the world. It is a reminder that the power and voice of the Holy Spirit blows and speaks where it wills. We cannot control it; rather, we are to be vigilant for signs of where God is leading us as individuals and as a church.

Through the Holy Spirit, God is still speaking today. As the church we proclaim Christ Jesus raised and alive, and it is the Holy Spirit who inspires us with the message and direction of our mission as a church today. The Holy Spirit is the living power of God animating the church through an astonishing variety of cultures and languages around the world. The Day of Pentecost described in the Book of Acts took place among people from Asia Minor, the Middle East, North Africa, along with visitors from Rome. Through them God was speaking to all peoples and nations.

St. Mark’s is also a church with people from many places, who speak many languages: French, Spanish, German, Chinese, Japanese, and more. 「聖霊は信仰によって、人間の心に宿られる三位一体である神の生きている力です！」 Which means “The Holy Spirit is the living power of the Triune God that dwells in the human heart through faith.” We should be prepared to hear other languages on Pentecost! We may not see tongues of fire, yet God is still speaking through the Holy Spirit.

On the Day of Pentecost, early Christians had a profound experience of the Holy Spirit. The Book of Acts reads, “*Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them,*

and a tongue rested on each of them.” They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, *“as the Spirit gave them ability.”*

We may never know precisely what happened on the Day of Pentecost, but we do know that early Christians experienced something that deeply changed them, shaped their preaching, and gave direction to their work. The power of the Holy Spirit has been leading and shaping the church ever since.

So though it may be hard to imagine what happened on the Day of Pentecost, I think we can all understand the gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the power that causes us to believe, speak and act with the love and justice of God in the world. We can feel the Spirit in the faith that burns inside of us.

All of us have probably experienced moments in our lives when we have been given the opportunity to speak words of encouragement, words of forgiveness, or words of love to someone. At such moments, without the luxury of preparation, the needed words appear helping us to minister to others. Perhaps you have wondered, “Where did those words come from?” The Holy Spirit is the power inspiring us to speak in ways that transcend the limitations of our lives. The Spirit is the power that helps us grow beyond our own limitations, helping us develop as people of God.

Today on Pentecost, we celebrate the Holy Spirit, but what is this Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit existed long before Pentecost. The Book of Genesis, describes the Spirit: *“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the spirit of God swept over the face of the waters”* (Gen. 1:2). In Hebrew, the word for Spirit is *“ruach,”* meaning “breath” or “wind.” The Holy Spirit moves like the wind with purpose and direction. In the Genesis story of the creation human beings, *“ruach”* is the breath of life that God breathed into human beings, so that we might become living beings. Therefore, every breath we take is holy, for God’s breath of life - *“ruach”* - dwells within us. The Holy Spirit was present in the mystery of creation with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit spoke through the Prophets, and Jesus sent the Spirit to his church. The eternal and Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit creates and communicates through the Spirit.

Long before wi-fi and cellular technology, God was already broadcasting (so to speak), on a wavelength that allows us to know and feel the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives. To say it a bit differently, human beings are created to know God. We are created with receptivity to God the Holy Spirit.

On the Day of Pentecost, early Christians received the Holy Spirit, which Peter explained in the words of the prophet Joel: *“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.”*

Human beings are more than simply rationally thinking beings, we are also visionary dreamers, using imagination, creativity and faith *to live into* divine visions and dreams for the future. Peter understood the power of the Holy Spirit as the power that allows human beings to hear the voice of God and imagine a future with God. We know that if we can imagine it, we can do it. Peter said “These people are not drunk; rather, they were filled with the Holy Spirit!” The power of the Holy Spirit allows us to dream and envision a divine future that the world may think sounds crazy.

For the early church, the Holy Spirit was the source of all guidance, dreams and visions for the future. After the Day of Pentecost in Acts, the Holy Spirit causes things to happen. Philip was led to baptize the Ethiopian eunuch; Peter was led to baptize Cornelius. God’s Spirit was beginning to be poured out on all people and nations. The Holy Spirit became the source of courage and the strength to live for today, while hoping for tomorrow and envisioning the future. It is impossible to imagine Christian faith without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

However, though we live in a postmodern age that is vastly different than the world of early Christians, our human condition has not changed. We are still in need vision and sacred dreaming that allows us to see with conviction the future God desires for humanity. The signs of our inability to order our world and save ourselves are all around us.

We are still living in a time of pandemic; we can see the end of the tunnel, but it is not over. We continue to live with great social division, and it seems we are incapable of fixing the human heart. Life will not return to what many call “normal” until the whole world is also healed. Though we cannot go back to February 2020, we have realized that God is and has been accompanying us this entire time. God is never far away from us. In today’s reading from Romans, Paul writes, *“For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.”* The Holy Spirit allows us to hope, dream and envision a future with the power to change the world for good.

Though the last year and a half have been difficult, yet even as we were apart from one another, we have also done new things by staying close to God. We developed our Sunday online service on Facebook, and we had a publically accessible service every Sunday (except March 15th, which was

the week that the pandemic suddenly made it impossible to gather). We developed “Children’s Church,” new programs and events for Youth, Confirmation Zoom classes, and Christian Education via email and Zoom. The Soup Kitchen continued to distribute meals every Thursday without fail. In spite of not being able to sing, our worship and music have continued to inspire through the gift of the Spirit, and we have been the recipients of the musical gifts of many talented musicians and vocalists. We have been led to know the presence of Christ, even in “Communion Kits.” Did you realize that the Holy Spirit has been continuing to breath, speak and live among us during this time – allowing us to dream and envision the future as a church? We have realized something that we should have known all along: God never leaves us; rather, the Holy Spirit always draws near to us. We are also poised to begin new things. We are in the planning stages of a musical program of recitals that we hope may begin in the fall. Can you see the Spirit’s vision, allowing us to dream for the future? Through the Holy Spirit, God is still speaking!

Today, significantly, we confirm three young men: Brady Ferner, Riley Smith, and Palmer Stevenson. Each of these young men have dreams and visions for their lives. They have grown in faith toward God and love for their neighbors, and today will share their dreams and vision with us in the reading of their “Faith Statements.” Like Paul’s word “*God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*” God has searched Brady, Riley, and Palmer and they know the presence of God in their lives. May the Holy Spirit lead and empower these three young men as they seek to live for Christ, neighbor and the world. Brady, Riley, and Palmer, please remember that with God’s help you can dream and envision the future. Listen for the voice of the Holy Spirit in your life!

In today’s gospel, Jesus says, “*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth...he will declare to you the things that are to come.*” Our task as Christians is to stay close to Jesus in prayer and to listen for the Spirit who “*will declare to you the things that are to come.*” Our future as the church is about dreaming and envisioning a future with God. This only happens with the fellowship of prayer, with God and among one another.

You have been created in the image and likeness of God: every breath you take is holy. The breath and Spirit of God is alive in you, and in every person you meet. Dream and envision the future with God - for with God all things are possible. You are filled with the Holy Spirit so that every breath you take may be in the service of God and this world God so loves. Amen.