

The Day of Pentecost: Holy Trinity Church: May 20, 2018

John 15: 26-27; 16:4b-15, Acts 2: 1-21:

O Come Holy Spirit and Enkindle in our Hearts the Fire of Thine Divine Love

Preached

By

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In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

There is nothing like a major hurricane, blizzard or Nor'easter to remind us how powerful wind can be. I will tell you one of my Navy sea stories. The only difference between this sea story and my other sea stories is this sea story is true. It was February and we were steaming up the Eastern Seaboard on our way home from refresher training in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba to our homeport in New Jersey. We were off the Virginia Capes when we encountered a very powerful blizzard. The captain turned the ship into the wind and waves with 12 knots rung up for speed. The ship stayed in that position for almost 24 hours until the wind subsided. We made no headway. But, we did survive the wind and the enormous waves. On a personal level, I know for a fact that some in this church call me "Old Windy" for whatever reason I cannot imagine. But that's a whole different kind of wind.

When the day of Pentecost came, Luke the writer of Acts says all the disciples of Jesus were gathered together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven. Wind filled the entire house. Then something else happened that was even more startling. Those gathered saw what appeared to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of those who were gathered in the room. Then to top it all off, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as the Holy Spirit enabled them. “Now there were staying in Jerusalem” Luke continues, “God fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: ‘Are all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? . . .’”

One lesson we can learn from the events on the day of Pentecost is that when the wind of God blows, amazing things happen. Did you know the Greek word for spirit “*pneuma*” is also the word for wind, as it is in the Hebrew. That, of course, is no accident. God breathed into the human person God’s own breath. God gave the human person God’s own Spirit and this is the relationship of wind and Spirit. Remember this, you and I are spiritual beings on a human journey on this earth. Wind, like the Spirit, is not only powerful

but it is also mysterious. It is invisible, but we can see the trees rustle as it passes by. It can be as soothing as a gentle breeze on a warm summer night or it can come with the destructive force of a tornado or typhoon.

Sometimes the wind seems to have a mind of its own. Jesus said on one occasion, “The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.” (John 3:8). This particular time it blew upon a group of individuals waiting in a room in Jerusalem just as their Lord had instructed them to do. He told them to wait until the Spirit came upon them and that is what they did. Then on the Day of Pentecost, just as he promised, the wind blew and the tongues of fire appeared. One of the greatest miracles of all occurred: these simple Galileans began to speak in such a way that everyone, regardless of where they came from could understand them in their own language. The Holy Spirit came and amazing things happened.

Of course there were skeptics present, as there always are. We read that some of the onlookers thought the disciples were drunk. They were not sure what to make of it all. We modern day followers of Jesus are not sure what to make of Pentecost either. Should we expect these kind of special effects in the church today and mighty winds and tongues of fire? Should we expect to be

miraculously transformed as these early disciples were transformed into communicators of the Gospel so effective that a multicultural audience could each understand what was being said in their own language?

It would be nice if such things could happen today. Who can deny that the contemporary church lacks power, life, energy, excitement? Episcopalians don't want to jump over pews, but it would be nice if American culture weren't already measuring us for a casket. For that is what is being said about many churches, we are dying. The church today needs the power of the Holy Spirit. We can all agree on that. But what would that mean? Would we have a new sense of excitement if the Spirit came upon us? I would hope so. That certainly happened to the church on the Day of Pentecost. Before Pentecost the followers of Jesus had been a group of very nervous people hiding behind locked doors fearful that they would be executed like Jesus. The church through the ages has dealt with all kinds of persecution. But look what happened. On this day the followers of Jesus came out from behind their closed doors so forcefully to testify to their faith in Jesus Christ that more than 3,000 bystanders were converted at one time. That's quite a transformation. On that day the church had a sense of excitement that was contagious. Wouldn't it be wonderful if that could happen to the church today? Churches all over our country are in a steady decline and we seem

helpless to do anything about it. What would happen if the Holy Spirit overcame us in the church today? Would it give us a sense of excitement?

There are two things that would surely happen to us if the Holy Spirit fell on our congregation today. We would have new sense of excitement and we would be enabled to care more about each other. I suspect a third thing would happen. We would be empowered to do what we already know God has called us to do. The truth of the matter is that we already know what God expects from Holy Trinity Church. We are to find people who are hurting and love them into the Kingdom of God. You are already doing this. I know Holy Trinity Church is filled with the Holy Spirit. I see it in your smiles. I see it in your joy. I see it in your great generosity that created this beautiful sanctuary. I feel the movement of the Holy Spirit in Holy Trinity Church every day. If other churches did that one thing Christian churches would never decline. It's really simple. But where do we get the motivation and the power to do what God has called us to do? There's only one way. We desperately need the Holy Spirit to fall upon us and transform us.

A little girl was visiting her grandmother in a small country town in the South. They attended a very emotional religious service, where people expressed their feelings by jumping up and down and shouting . . . what we

might call a “Holy Roller” service. The little girl asked her grandmother if all the jumping meant the Holy Spirit was really there. Her grandmother said, “Honey, it don’t matter how high they jump up, it’s what they do when they come down that will tell you if it is the real thing.”

My sisters and brothers, the church at Pentecost set the pattern for us. Pentecost is not about jumping up and down. It is about seeking God constantly in prayer. The American culture of rugged individualism has caused so many people trying to go it alone. Too many churches are trying to go it alone. They act as though the only thing that can occur with prayer is what psychologically takes place within a person. If we are to come into God’s presence, then we must ask to be in God’s presence.

I want to read to you what the President said about our nation: “We have been the recipients of the greatest blessings of heaven. We have been preserved in peace and prosperity. We have grown in numbers, wealth and power, as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand, which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success,

we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to God that made us. We should be moved then to humble ourselves before the God, to confess our national sins, and to pray for clemency and forgiveness.”

The President said this on April 30, 1863! Abraham Lincoln said these words proclaiming a National Day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer. Our need for prayer has not changed. Nations as well as individual people stand in need of prayer. We need prayer for guidance. We need prayer for deliverance. We need prayer to shape us into people of integrity. We need prayer to God to forgive us for our sins.

That’s what Pentecost is really about. So, here is our challenge for this week? Could we be a Pentecostal church in the best sense of that word? I use the word ‘Pentecostal’ as an adjective. The answer is yes, if we pray today that God would send God’s Spirit upon us and if we open our hearts so that our hearts are receptive to God’s Spirit. Then, and only then, will we sense the mighty power of God come upon us. So we pray, O Come Holy Spirit and Enkindle in our Hearts the Fire of Your Divine Love. Amen.