

REFLECTIONS FOR PENTECOST SUNDAY ~ 05 June 2022

The Mount ~ The Residence at Litledale



Today the Jewish community celebrates Shavuot, the fiftieth day since Passover. Shavuot brings together Earth and heaven with its commemoration of both the wheat harvest in Israel and the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. This was the feast day which the disciples of Jesus were celebrating when they experienced the presence of the Spirit among them and within them in a special way. Ever since that day, the Christian community commemorates Pentecost, the fiftieth day since Easter Sunday, as the birthday of the Church.

Our readings today remind us of two startling realities. While the reading from the Acts of the Apostles tells of the coming of the Spirit fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, the reading from John's Gospel says that the Spirit descended on the apostles on the evening of Easter Sunday when Jesus joins them in the Upper Room. In Jesus' words at the Last Supper again from John's Gospel, he says, "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you" (Jn 14:26). At the Last Supper and in that same Upper Room on Easter Sunday evening, Jesus intertwines the coming of the Spirit with "peace," with living God's word, and with sending forth.

In the account from the Acts of the Apostles, there are many more disciples than the apostles present, including Mary, the mother of Jesus. In this narrative of the coming of the Spirit, the emphasis is on the Spirit coming to each one individually as well as to the community. The first gift is that of the ability to understand and speak in other languages, the many languages of the people who have gathered from around their known world for the feast of Shavuot. The impetus to share the good news is also evident in the rest of the narrative (which is not read today) and begins immediately with the three thousand who chose to become followers of the Way on that first day.

There is a comforting sense that the coming of the Spirit is not confined to one day or to one space. As one spiritual writer says, "Pentecost moments have been happening down through history since that day the Church was born. When the Spirit breaks into the lives of individuals and communities to bind people together in the name of Jesus Christ for the purposes of the Kin-dom of God, Pentecost possibilities become the dreams and visions of disciples. Pentecost possibilities still happen today." Hildegard of Bingen has the beautiful prayer to the Spirit:

Holy Spirit, the life that gives life:
You are the cause of all movement.
You are the breath of all creatures.
You are the salve that purifies our souls.



You are the ointment that heals our wounds.
You are the fire that warms our hearts.
You are the light that guides our feet.
Let all the world praise you.

Psalm 104 gives us the second delightful reminder – God’s Spirit has been there since the creation of the cosmos, “When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the Earth” (Ps 104:30). The Hebrew word for spirit, breath, and wind is the same, *ruah*.



The wonder of that interconnection is the sense that the Earth’s wind, the person’s breath, and God’s Spirit are one, all part of a sacred communion which is manifested in creation and is made richer in the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus. In the first verses of Genesis, with the creation of the cosmos, “God’s first act of mercy,” we read, “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 (*ruah*) of God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light” (Gen 1:1-3).

Psalm 104 adds depth to the presence of the Spirit at creation by proclaiming that creation is ongoing, for people and for Earth. Every newborn person, ever newly growing plant, every newly imagined work of art, every new idea is the face of Earth renewed. Every day we see newness all around us even if we are in the midst of suffering or anxiety. How have you seen creation renewed, the Spirit active, in this past week?

Whether we read the story of Pentecost in Acts, the breathing of the Spirit into us in John’s Gospel, or the Spirit renewing the face of Earth in Psalm 104, two intersecting themes permeate – that of inclusion and that of sending forth.

The Spirit in Acts enables the disciples to understand and speak the languages of all peoples of Earth, a metaphor for openness to all goodness around us, no matter how unusual or unexpected. Jesus breathes the Spirit into the disciples after sending them to be peacemakers and bringers of reconciliation. The psalm reminds us that Earth is full of God’s creatures and that God rejoices in God’s works. And the second reading from the letter to the Corinthians continues that theme of inclusion by reminding us that our gifts and talents and uniqueness all come from the Spirit who animates them within us. Paul tells us, “In the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13). Peter, in his homily to the people after the disciples have been filled with the Spirit, quotes the prophet Joel and repeats the same teaching, “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young ones shall see visions, and your old ones shall dream dreams.



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Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17-18).

The sending forth to share the good news echoes through all the readings. The Benedictine monk, Ivan Nicoletto osb Cam, says, “Pentecost reminds us that Christ's spirit is not mild or temperate but a disrupting force, a caring love that disconcerts and unsettles the systems of this world, redefining power from the inside out and from the bottom up. We usually think and act in terms of continuities, predictability, repetition of schemes and plans, and the Pentecostal event show us God's capacity to interrupt, to break those schemes open, and to violate those formulae: it is a bold and risky spirit, even disobedient, when it is a matter of uncovering new paths of life.” The mystic, Mechtild of Magdeburg, says the same thing more poetically:

Effortlessly,
Love flows from God into humans,
Like a bird
Who rivers the air
Without moving her wings.
Thus we move in God's world,
One in body and soul,
Though outwardly separate in form.
As the Source strikes the note,
Humanity sings--
The Holy Spirit is our harpist,
And all strings
Which are touched in Love
Must sound.

Bruce Epperly reminds us, “There is a mystic within each of us. God addresses all of us in sighs too deep for words. God's Spirit is always beckoning us toward more than we can ask or imagine. The omnipresence of God insures a Godward movement in all of our lives, even when we are unaware of it. Pentecost is a day for mystics and spiritual adventurers.”

On this day for mystics and spiritual adventurers, we end our reflections with a blessing written by Jan Richardson:

This is the blessing we cannot speak by ourselves.
This is the blessing we cannot summon by our own devices,
cannot shape to our purpose, cannot bend to our will.
This is the blessing that comes
when we leave behind our aloneness
when we gather together
when we turn toward one another.
This is the blessing that blazes among us
when we speak the words strange to our ears
when we finally listen into the chaos
when we breathe together at last.