

## The Festival of Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21

June 11-12, 2011

### *“Divine Disruption”*

“Merry Christmas,” we say to one another when we celebrate the gift of God the Father in giving his only Son, Jesus. “Happy Easter,” we say to one another when we rejoice in Christ’s resurrection from death and the grave.” But what do we say to one another when we come together for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost? A “Pleasant Pentecost” to you? Christmas celebrates the Father’s gift, and we get that. Easter celebrates the Son’s resurrection, and we get that. But the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, whom we celebrate at Pentecost, is a lot harder to nail down. We don’t have all the hoopla of customs and traditions to go with this festival. Even our Pentecost greeting is uncertain. So, there may be a lot not only about Pentecost, but about the Holy Spirit, that we don’t get. The story of that first Pentecost in today’s Epistle lesson is full of mystery and awe: the sound of a mighty rushing wind, tongues of fire, sudden ability to speak in other languages, faltering and timid disciples made bold to stand before people and testify to the Lord Jesus. This is the Holy Spirit; as Luther writes in his explanation of the Third Article of the Creed: the One who “calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on Earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.” The work of the Spirit can be something of a divine disruption that pushes us in new directions, prods us forward when we don’t feel like moving, breathing new life into the ordered predictability of our life. And we pray, “Come, Holy Spirit!” The message for this Festival of Pentecost is entitled, “Divine Disruption.” May the Lord’s rich blessing rest upon the preaching, the hearing, and the living of his Word, for Jesus’ sake.

Moses’ desire and prayer in today’s Old Testament lesson ((Numbers 11:24-30), **“Would that all the Lord’s people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit on them!”** and of Joel’s prophecy uttered by Peter in his Pentecost sermon, **“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh”** (Joel 2:28), find their fulfillment in the sending of the Holy Spirit. Our own Pentecost festival has its roots in an ancient Jewish harvest festival of the same name. This original celebration, fifty days after Passover, gave thanks to God for the giving of the first five books of the Bible, the books of Moses. This is what was going on in Jerusalem that brought together **“devout men from every nation under heaven.”** Some of those nations are still familiar to us 2000 years later, and some are not: Parthians and Medes, Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Cyrene, Rome, Crete, Arabia (Acts 2:1-21). All of these people had assembled for the Jewish festival of Pentecost when something completely unexpected and amazing happened: the Holy Spirit was poured out upon the first disciples, completely transforming them to carry the good news of Jesus out into the world, and life would never be the same. There was a divine disruption!

Isn’t that how the Spirit works in our lives today? We sort of bump along in life, doing the same things we’ve always done, not really thinking or planning to change anything. We show up for worship, not looking for or expecting anything different. But then all of a sudden, a particular verse from Scripture jumps out at us, something in the sermon speaks especially to us, a particular hymn or prayer moves us to tears, receiving the Sacrament fills us with a joy and peace that truly transcends all human understanding,

and we are moved beyond what words can express. We are given fresh insight and new understanding about our faith in Christ. We are convicted of sin in our life that stands in the way of our relationship with the Lord, and we are moved to repentance. We are blessed in a different and deeper way with the good news that Christ Jesus gave his life for me – for me! We are encouraged and strengthened for our journey of faith. My friends, these are divine disruptions – not disruptions in the sense of distractions that throw us off-course, leaving us irritated and annoyed, but disruptions that break us out of our comfortable and complacent routines so that the work of the Holy Spirit, that mighty rushing wind, can shake the dead wood out of our lives and breathe new life into our faith. Certainly, the work of the Holy Spirit is not confined to these four walls. Because that Spirit lives within the people of Christ, that Spirit goes with us out into the world, a world that needs the presence and power of the Spirit now more than ever. The world is in need of the Holy Spirit. Are we ready to share that Spirit with the world?

When all is said and done, the purpose and work of the Holy Spirit is to direct us to Jesus and his redeeming work. Peter's Pentecost sermon, a portion of which is in today's Epistle lesson, clearly points people to Jesus. Inspired by the Spirit, Peter draws upon the prophet Joel and declares: **“And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved”** (Joel 2:32, Acts 2:21). The words “call upon” here mean a cry from the heart; a cry that mourns sin and implores God's mercy. That is the work of the Holy Spirit, then and now: convicting us of everything in our life that separates us from God and one another, calling us to a new life that is rooted in God's great love in Jesus Christ, creating in us new and clean hearts in which the Spirit can make his home. With the Holy Spirit taking up residence in our hearts, we can expect and anticipate those divine disruptions that chart a new course for living, that give us perseverance and strength to walk by faith, that open our eyes to the opportunities where we can point others to Jesus; to see our lives and the world through the eyes of Jesus. And so the words of Psalm 104 which we sang earlier begin to be fulfilled in our lives: **“When you send forth your Spirit, we are renewed, we are renewed.”**

As we come together for our congregational meeting at noon on Sunday, we celebrate the Spirit's presence and power at work among us. We will hear reports from the different ministries and elect new officers, giving thanks to God for those officers who have served. We will be briefed about Hispanic ministry, and consider a proposal to embark on a new outreach ministry to Arabic-speaking people. We will hear how our congregation is doing financially at the mid-year point, and seek approval to consolidate loans on our westside property. We will receive a report from the Vision Implementation Team (VIT) and get an update on benefits changes for church workers. We will consider by-laws changes and hear about the summer worship service schedule. If this sounds mundane or ho-hum, remember that it is the Holy Spirit who is at work among us. Divine disruptions are possible! A blessed and Spirit-filled Pentecost to you, in Jesus' Name. Amen.