

PENTECOST SUNDAY JUNE 12, 2011 CYCLE "A"

TITLE: THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT

READINGS: Acts 2:1-21, Ps.104:24-34,35b. 1Cor.12:3b-13, John 20:19-23

“And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting” Acts 2:2. We have all experienced the wind. Some of us have experienced strong, maybe gale winds or even tornado winds. It reminds me of the two farmers who were boasting about the strongest kind of wind they’d ever seen. “Out here in California,” said one, “I saw the fiercest wind in my life. You know these giant redwood trees? Well, the wind once got so strong, it bent them right down.” “That’s nothing,” said the other farmer, “Back on my farm in Iowa, we had a terrible wind one day that blew a hundred miles an hour. It was so bad one of my hens had her back turned to the wind and she laid the same egg six times.” Humor aside, if we were to interview any of the people who experienced the tremendously violent tornadoes which have devastated Joplin, Missouri and so many other places in our country this spring, they would tell us about the terrifying wind, the utter hopeless panic-stricken dread which enveloped them as they heard the overpowering, devastating roar of the wind. And with the sound of the wind at Pentecost the disciples saw “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.” Acts 1:3-4.

The word our Gospel writers use for spirit is a special word. It is the Greek word *pneuma* and it is the same word used for breath. It carries with it the connotation of tremendous power. It is Genesis that tells us, “God breathed into (Adam’s) his nostrils the breath of life” Gen.2:7. And it was Jesus who breathed on his disciples and told them to “receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven.” Jn.20:22-23 Then again Jesus commissions his disciples and assures them of this Pentecost event when he tells them, “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father will testify on my behalf. You are also to testify because you have been with me from the beginning” Jn.15:26.

The power of the Holy Spirit, is infinitely more powerful than any tornado or hurricane. The breath of God and power of his Spirit has moved creation. It has shaped and formed us from the first Pentecost until now and will until the end of

time. The wind that came down on the Day of Pentecost was the most significant wind that has ever blown. When we Christians profess, "I believe in the Holy Spirit," we are making an extraordinary claim, because we profess that God works on us in a very personal fashion, just like the Spirit did on the disciples, from the inside out. We inhale the Spirit and exhale the love that we didn't realize was in us. We declare that the Holy Spirit is a person not an "it". The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Blessed Trinity. Martin Luther tells us "Christ, our redeemer and Salvation, himself testifies and preaches to us in the finest manner that the Holy Spirit is the eternal and omnipotent God." (W-T 6, No.6655)

Before Pentecost the disciples found it challenging to do easy things. They locked themselves in the upper room for fear of the Jews. But after Pentecost they found it easy to do challenging things. Peter threw open the doors of that upper room and with the power of the Spirit preached the Good News to thousands without fear. The disciples had inhaled the Holy Spirit and found themselves acting with a power they hadn't before experienced and people of all nations discovered Jesus Christ.

But the problem we face is that so many Christians believe in God, they accept the great doctrines of the church, but they do not feel God's presence in their lives. They have never heard the sound of the wind. They have never breathed in the Spirit. We must have confidence that the Holy spirit is at work in our lives and that we have been given power through that same Spirit to bring the Good News of the Gospel to our world. Many times the Spirit is at work in us and through us and we aren't even aware of it until we experience the effects of the Holy Spirit's work later or look back and have that "oh, the Spirit was at work" realization.

Pastor Richard E. Stetler tells of a wealthy woman who left the church but chose to remain on the rolls in order to receive the church newsletter. She had a falling out with the minister some years before and vowed never to return. She became hospitalized and the minister was informed by another member of the congregation. Knowing that this woman would not be overjoyed to see him, the minister chose to send the newly hired seminary student on the church staff. He told the seminarian none of this woman's history.

The young man went. He entered her very dark, private room and as he approached the bed, he accidentally dislodged the side railing and it slammed down. As he was explaining who he was, he attempted to raise the side railing to its proper position. In so doing he knocked over the woman's water pitcher and water spilled

over the top of the stand and onto the floor. Totally humiliated the young seminarian decided to say a prayer and leave. As he prayed his anxiety level allowed none of his words to come out correctly. He was emotionally hemorrhaging as he said "Amen." He left the room believing he was not destined to become a minister.

When he got back to the church, a phone call came for him. It was the patient he had just visited. She said, "Young man, you must come back. I apologize for not speaking. I was trying so hard not to burst out laughing at what you were trying to do with such sincerity that I was too embarrassed to speak. I have not laughed for years. You gave me a precious gift. You helped me realize that for the last several years I have been in a prison of my own creation."

This young seminarian who went to minister to the woman had good intentions but his actions were inept. That's all right, because when we go out to serve Christ, we do not go alone. The Holy Spirit goes with us. The Holy Spirit found a way to minister to this woman through the ineptness of the young seminarian. And this is what we discover time and time again. The Holy Spirit makes up for our inadequacy.

When Jesus left our world, he promised that the Holy Spirit would come upon all who believed in him. We cannot program the Holy Spirit. It blows where it will. But we can let it blow into our hearts and make us new people. The Holy Spirit may be working in someone's heart this moment. Here is what it offers: new life new joy and new effectiveness in serving Christ. Open your heart and let the wind of God blow into your life. **Amen.**

Pastor Barney