

May 31, 2020

'Winds of Change' (Acts 2:1-18)

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Celebrating Pentecost is so different this year!
While we are disappointed at not being able to celebrate in person at church,
this is an opportunity to explore the work of the Holy Spirit in new ways.

Pentecost in the Jewish tradition was known as the Festival of Weeks.
When the disciples met for the Festival of Weeks and the Holy Spirit
entered like flames of passion-filled fire,
like a rush of wind giving them the ability to understand different languages –
the church was born! The fire of Pentecost power blazed!

During the past few days, we have watched, horrified,
as the flames of racism have once again caught fire in the murder,
some are calling the 'lynching' of African-American George Floyd in Minnesota.
Watching the video as the white police officer presses his knee
on the neck of Floyd until he is dead is unreal and devastating.
So many people,
of all political stripes are actively protesting in Minneapolis and all over our nation.
I am grateful to have signed a petition to the mayor of Minneapolis.

Our nation's leader early on, tweeted his strong disapproval of the protests,
saying, "When the looting begins, the shooting starts."
I have just read that the National Guard has been sent in
to control the protests in Minneapolis- a move never before made in Minnesota.
The White House has been on Lock-down as protesters gather
in front of the building in Lafayette Park to protest this horrendous killing of George Floyd.

Speaking of Pentecost fire, what a conflagration!
T.S. Eliot once wrote (after he survived the German bombing of London,)
**"The only hope, or else despair - Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre
– To be redeemed from fire by fire."** (from the poem 'Little Gidding.')

We are stunned and agonized by this and other recent racist events!
Like Eliot, we have a choice: to be destroyed in these fires,
or to allow the Holy Spirit to refine, renew and restore!
Let the fire of the Spirit work: to be redeemed by fire from fire!

Amidst this most recent racist event, we also experience
fear, despair and loneliness due to the Covid-19 event.

During the last weeks, we read in The Gospel of John that before Jesus died, he assured the disciples that they would never be alone:
“The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you.”

Even though Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection & spent time with them, it was not the same as it had been. Their teacher and friend had also been murdered by the powers that be – because of differences and perceived threat to the existing system.

The Holy Spirit breathed new life & purpose into the room where the disciples gathered, and it quickly spread far beyond their dreams. On this Pentecost, we too can experience the Holy Spirit breathing new life and purpose into us as we figure out how to navigate what lies ahead.

Most Biblical scholars believe that the book of Acts was written by Luke. If he sounds familiar, it is because that’s the same guy who wrote the gospel of Luke. In fact, Acts is known as the companion book to Luke. Between these two books, they make up almost 30% of the Christian Scriptures, so we are talking about quite a portion! The role of the Holy Spirit in our lives is referenced 56 times. The wind and fire of Pentecost signals **change**:
Let the work of the Spirit begin through us: Jesus’ disciples of today!

What is it about our church we would like to change?
The way we worship, the places we gather, among other ways we are ‘church?’
How will church family look different next year and the year after and the year after?
The Holy Spirit is ‘all over,’ all about change!

Today we are looking at Pentecost, and as we take a look at what happened on Pentecost many years ago, we see many people’s lives were changed. Today we are looking at racist killing and navigating the Coronavirus. The Holy Spirit is also interested in changing us.

Major changes took place on Pentecost.
One change was what happened to the disciples.
The disciples believed in Jesus,
but they were still very confused about all kinds of different things.

They still didn't fully understand Jesus' mission.
They were still wondering if Jesus would be an earthly king.
They were confused, and as a result, they were afraid.
They thought he was going into Jerusalem to straighten things out -take over the nation.

But as I have said, Jesus went into Jerusalem and was murdered, instead.

The disciples were feeling anchorless.
They weren't feeling confident about their next steps in ministry.

But then, thank God, Pentecost came.
The disciples were together, when the sound of a blowing wind came to them.
It felt like tongues of fire settled on their heads.
They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to understand one another,
though different languages were being spoken!
A crowd gathered, people from all over their world,
and they listened to the disciples speaking about God.

Then another change happened: Peter stood up and addressed the crowd
– he gave a beautiful sermon that the Holy Spirit inspired him to preach,
a sermon that moved nearly 3000 people to be baptized & become believers in one day.
Their whole way of looking at God, at themselves, at the world, at life
- everything had changed.

The other disciples were changed as well. Now, they were confident, speaking publicly.
Think about Peter –
two months earlier he was so afraid that he denied Jesus three times.
Now he was speaking to the crowd with confidence and understanding t
that he had never had before.

Again: Pentecost can be summed up in one word, and I believe that word is change.
We can see the change that took place in the disciples,
and the change that took place in those 3000 people.
Our world is definitely in the midst of change during Covid-19.
There are so many of us
right now, who are like those disciples were before Pentecost
–confused, anxious, fearful.
We also need the Holy Spirit to come to us, and change us!

But how? On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came directly to those disciples.
The Holy Spirit may not come with the loud sound of a wind,
or with what seems like tongues of fire,
or with the ability to understand and speak in foreign languages.
Now-a-days, the coming of the Holy Spirit may not look like seem as spectacular.
But on the inside of us and in the world, all kinds of changes are taking place.

How can we be more confident? How can we speak and live God's truth and justice?
How can we be more at peace with God and ourselves?
How can we live up to the potential with which our God creates us?
How can we live in and through this inflammatory time of racial injustice
and this Coronavirus time and emerge changed for the better:
as individuals and as a church?

This is what the Holy Spirit does now
and did in a miraculous, unusual way on that first Pentecost.
The color of Pentecost is traditionally red. Why is that?
Red reminds us of what seemed like tongues of fire on the disciples' heads.
Red reminds us of the invisible fire of faith that's burning inside of us,
the gift that the Holy Spirit has given to us.
If you were to give the Holy Spirit a color, maybe the best color would be red,
the color of fire, the color of passion.

Pentecost: Change.....
in ourselves, in our nation, in our church, in our dealings with racial injustice.
May the Holy Spirit continue to work through you and me,
to change us, to fan into flame the fire that is in us!

May the Holy Spirit blow through the rooms in which we worship today
- various rooms in different places,
filled with frightened and heartbroken disciples – you and me!

And may the Force [of God... like wind, like fire, like passion...]
be with us, now and always! Amen.