

SPGG#132, Pentecost C

May 27, 2007 – Fr. Charles Pope

Acts 2:1-21

Romans 8:14-17

John 14:8-17, 25-27

I have always thought that the story of Pentecost in the early church was as confusing as it was uplifting and awe inspiring. But I think confusion and questioning are part of the story. As you heard in the Acts reading today, they, referring to the disciples, were as it says, **gathered in one place on the day of Pentecost**. Suddenly from heaven, as it says, there came a sound **like the rush of a violent wind, filling the entire house where they were sitting**. So it is established that the disciples are all in one place on the Day of Pentecost, and they were sitting together. While they were sitting the sound of this wind from heaven came, filling the entire house. And then, again as it says, **Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them**. So there they are sitting together. Then comes this sound of a wind. Then comes tongues, not of fire, but **as of fire**, as it says, resting on each of the disciples. And then it says, **that all of the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability**.

Meanwhile, outside where they were sitting, a crowd had gathered when they heard the sound of the wind. And they heard the disciples, who were Galileans, speaking in the language of whoever heard them. It says there were: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and many others who spoke different languages. And each person heard the disciples speaking in the listener's own native tongue.

And the subject of what they were saying was about **God's deeds of power**. Some of the people who witnessed this were **perplexed**, as it says and wondered what it meant.

Others thought they had all had too much to drink. The last half of the reading is Peter's sermon on this Day of Pentecost. He reviewed for them how the prophet, Joel, had said, **In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams**. Peter further quoted Joel in speaking of the end times, of **portents in the heavens above and in the earth below**. And then Peter summarizes the coming of Jesus Christ, his mission, the wonders that he performed, how he was crucified and rose again.

On that day the followers of Jesus with many other Jews from different nations had gathered to celebrate Pentecost. The word Pentecost is the Greek word for the Jewish Feast of Weeks occurring within the Passover celebration. Pentecost fell on the fiftieth day after the barley sheaf in Passover. It was the beginning of the offering of first fruits.

So that was why they were all there. But after the events of the sound of the wind and the tongues as of fire and speaking in different languages, the early communities of the followers of Jesus appropriated those accounts into a more Christian celebration.

J.G. Davies in his book, The Early Christian Church, says that the church before 325 AD had a very simple church calendar. It was characterized by the Holy Eucharist on the first day of the week.

And it was characterized by two major annual festivals, Pascha, or a Christian Passover, which was a combined celebration of the crucifixion and the resurrection, and Pentecost, the fifty days after the resurrection. Over the years this very simple calendar gained more celebrations to make it what it is today.

But, given that background, there is still a spiritual task before us. And that is to get our hearts and minds in tune with this story of Pentecost to see what it can mean for us in these days. And that task would be before us in any scripture we read. But I have found this story particularly daunting over time. There is so much to consider at once. The story is about all the disciples, not just one of them. It is about "tongues as of fire" over each of them and the sound of rushing wind from heaven. It is about crowds of people who witnessed these occurrences. And it is about Peter's sermon.

On the other hand, this story is not that different from a gathering of people to worship in a church. On any given Sunday there will be people in a church who harbor deeply spiritual experiences, whether they have to do with tongues as of fire and rushing wind or not. On some Sundays these experiences may be more prominent, and on some Sundays less so. All of us, when we come here, bring a life. That life, depending on the day or the week, or the month, or the times may be filled with joy or accomplishment or excitement or love. But that life depending on the time might also be filled with despair, pain, fear, and loneliness. It might be filled with confusion, uncertainty, and devastation.

Each life that comes here will bring a need to be understood, a need to be heard, a need to be loved. And many of us are always praying that there is enough spirituality here that all who come will feel welcomed, accepted, and understood. If, in Christ, that is what we want here, and that is what we are working toward, then we are the church in that effort.

All of our hopes and dreams in this church make us more the church. And in the church that emerges in hearts that anticipate and hope in Christ there is magic and there is accomplishment. And in that desiring, in that hoping, in that accomplishing in Christ, there is no project that cannot be completed. There is no devastation that cannot be endured and dealt with. And in the magic of God that is in and around the people of St. Paul's, there is nothing that cannot be done.

The real story of Pentecost in the first century, I think, is how those people were affected that day, and what emerged in their lives afterwards. The real story for Pentecost today at St. Paul's is the same. It is about how we are affected by the presence of God. It is about what will emerge in our lives afterwards.

But I will let you in on a little secret. That emerging is already happening here. I feel it every time I gather here with you. And it is a prayer of my heart and soul that we would allow it to emerge even more, that we would be more the church.

How can I describe this emerging further? How can I make it more visible? As I look out over this congregation I am mindful of your lives in Christ. And in many instances I am mindful of what you face and what you go through. And I am mindful of your hopes, your dreams, of your astonishing faith.

And I am mindful of our oneness and the sensitivity that is here. And I am mindful that there is much empathy and understanding for each language of the heart that is spoken here.

In the presence of Christ, is it too much to say that when I think of tongues as of fire over persons, I think of you? When I think of our collective faith, is it too much to say that you are my rushing wind? If it is too much, then I am in trouble.

I thank God for the magic and the love and the service of the Church, for the tongues as of fire and the rushing wind. And on this Pentecost I thank God for you. Amen.