



Liturgical Day: The Day of Pentecost
Date: May 31, 2009
Title: When the Holy Spirit Moves

The Spirit of God;
Violent wind – tongues of fire;
Empowering faith.

There is a story that I enjoy about a couple that finds the time is upon them to go to the hospital for their first child. She says to him, "Honey, I think it's time. Will you call the hospital and let them know that we're on our way?" The husband, nervous as can be, calls the hospital, "Hello, my wife is pregnant and we are on our way. We'll be there within a few minutes," he says. The nurse on the other end of the phone says, "Is this her first child?" "No it isn't," he replies, "this is her husband." Obviously, the nurse and the father are having a problem with communication. She asks him one thing, and he hears something entirely different. It's a story that sounds ridiculous to us, but one that points out how difficult communication can be in certain circumstances.

The story of Pentecost is a story about communication, and it is one of the more exciting stories in the Bible! We can hardly imagine what a day Pentecost must have been for those first Christians. It takes place not long after Jesus speaks his last words to the disciples as he departs into heaven: "And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high... Before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit." And so the disciples do just that: they return to Jerusalem with great joy. They continue to carry out the necessary business. They stay together, no doubt remembering the many experiences they had with Jesus. And they wait for the fulfillment of what Jesus has promised them. As this morning's first lesson teaches us, when the Day of Pentecost comes, the believers are gathered together in the city, still waiting. All of a sudden the incredible begins to happen: they hear a noise that sounds like the rush of a mighty wind. Something that looks like tongues of fire appears - and spreads out to touch each person there. They are filled with the Holy Spirit, and begin to speak in other languages: languages that they have never known. What a day that must have been, and what a time to be a follower of Jesus.

But there is a temptation on Pentecost Day. There is a temptation to focus on what happened to those disciples. There is a tendency to imagine what it must have been like to be there. After all, it was a tremendous experience for them. It must have shaken them to the very core, to have such incredible things happening to them. It must have been an experience that left them changed forever.

FIRST LESSON
ACTS 2:1-21

or

NUMBERS 11:24-30

PSALM

PSALM 104:25-34, 35B

SECOND LESSON

ROMANS 8:22-27

or

ACTS 2:1-21

GOSPEL LESSON

St. JOHN 15:26-27, 16:4B-15

PRAYER OF THE DAY
MIGHTY GOD, YOU
BREATHE LIFE INTO OUR
BONES, AND YOUR SPIRIT
BRINGS TRUTH TO THE
WORLD. SEND US THIS SPIRIT,
TRANSFORM US BY YOUR
TRUTH, AND GIVE US
LANGUAGE TO PROCLAIM
YOUR GOSPEL, THROUGH
JESUS CHRIST, OUR SAVIOR
AND LORD, WHO LIVES AND
REIGNS WITH YOU AND THE
HOLY SPIRIT, ONE GOD,
NOW AND FOREVER. AMEN.

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We can only speculate as to how much Pentecost changed the lives of those first believers - and how differently others perceived them after that experience. But the truth is, to do such speculating is to miss the whole point of Pentecost. Because it's not the change in those believers that stands at the center of our story today. If this story were simply about what happened to those people, it would be no more significant than all the other stories about them – certainly not a story that is worthy of its own festival in the church year. The central meaning of the Day of Pentecost is not that the followers of Jesus had an ecstatic experience of the Holy Spirit. The story of Pentecost is a story about communication. It is a story about communicating the Gospel in a way that some three thousand souls were added to the number of the faithful that day. It is a story about communicating the Gospel in a way that spread belief in the Christ to people of every nation and every language. Significant changes no doubt took place in the lives of those who experienced the moving of the Holy Spirit within them on that first Day of Pentecost. But to concentrate too much on those changes is to miss the point. The Holy Spirit moved among them in a powerful way that day so that others might come to understand and believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Saint Peter himself draws our attention in that direction in the sermon he preaches on Pentecost Day – words of which end our first lesson this morning. Peter quotes the prophet Joel, closing with these words: "...whoever calls out to the Lord for help will be saved." As Joel prophesied many years earlier, these events took place so that many might hear of God's plan for them, and become believers in the Messiah, who came to save them.

There is an inherent danger in these kinds of miraculous stories. Stories like the Day of Pentecost. Stories like the Ascension or the Transfiguration of our Lord. Stories like the conversion of St. Paul. Even stories like the Exodus, the Flood, and Creation. The danger is that we might begin to appreciate them only for the manner in which they affect the main characters. We are tempted to look at Peter, or Paul, or Moses, and think, "My what a fortunate experience. If only God would move me like that one day." Or even more so: we are tempted to conclude that those who have such experiences are the real Christians – the more faithful Christians – the more spiritual Christians. That's the way it was when I grew up. Those who were more articulate about describing their experiences with the Holy Spirit were assumed to be more advanced in their Christian faith, and in their relationship with God. And those of us who couldn't tell stories about how the Spirit moved us with the same confidence and clarity were assumed to be lesser Christians.

But the truth is: when the Spirit moves, it does not create faith experiences for the sake of faith experiences. Instead, the Spirit moves in order to further God's kingdom. The Spirit moves in ways that help to spread the word. The Spirit moves, and strengthens believers for work of sharing their faith with others. The Spirit moves, and God uses it to empower the faithful to be better witnesses to the faith they had been given.

We might consider this mornings' worship service in the very same manner. What will come of all this activity? What will come from the message I had for the children today? What will come from having the

decorations, the enthusiasm, and the words that we share this morning? What will come from the music that is offered to us here? What will come from the words of this sermon? If it will only please us, and make this time of worship more entertaining, then we've missed the mark. If it will only treat us to one last bang before the summer comes, then we've missed the mark. If it will only prove that we've got class, and really know how to make worship special, then we've missed the mark. But if it will enthrall us to do the same work that those disciples did in Jerusalem, then it will have been worth it. If it will excite five people here this morning to share their faith with a friend, it will have been worth it. If it will encourage us to allow the Holy Spirit to speak through us as well - in situations where we may feel unqualified or unprepared - then it will have been worth it. The Day of Pentecost, the kind of experience that we have this morning; these kinds of events are opportunities for the Spirit to move us to act in concrete ways that further the work of God's Kingdom. And our remembering of the Day of Pentecost helps to remind us of the power and importance in continuing to let God's Spirit move through us in just such a way.

So let's get on with our remembering. And let's get on with our celebrating. But let's not forget why the Spirit moved so mightily on that first Christian Pentecost Day. Let's not forget that at the center of the story was communication. At the center of the story was the fact that some 3,000 souls were added to the fellowship on that day. At the center of the story was the Holy Spirit moving through the lives of those believers - not in order to give them some sort of a spiritual thrill, but in order that more and more might come to believe in Christ. May that be the same for our time of worship this morning. May the music, and the decorations, and the bread and the wine, and the words we share this morning move us as well. And may we leave this place, excited to become vehicles of God's Holy Spirit; looking for chances to spread the good news that we've heard.

The Holy Spirit moved powerfully on that Day of Pentecost. May that be true in our day as well. Amen. Let's spread the news.

Amen.

David J. Risendal, Pastor (May 31, 2009)

Gospel Lesson: English Text ⁱ

^{15.26} "When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify on my behalf. ²⁷ You also are to testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

^{16.4b} "I did not say these things to you from the beginning, because I was with you. ⁵ But now I am going to him who sent me; yet none of you asks me, 'Where are you going?' ⁶ But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. ⁷ Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and

ⁱ A list of Bible lessons for the coming weeks is available at <http://www.elca.org/Growing-In-Faith/Worship/Lectionary.aspx>.

judgment: ⁹ about sin, because they do not believe in me; ¹⁰ about righteousness, because I am going to the Father and you will see me no longer; ¹¹ about judgment, because the ruler of this world has been condemned.

¹² "I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. ¹³ When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. ¹⁴ He will glorify me, because he will take what is mine and declare it to you. ¹⁵ All that the Father has is mine. For this reason I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you." ⁱⁱ

Gospel Lesson: Greek Text

^{15:26} Όταν ἔλθῃ ὁ παράκλητος ὃν ἐγὼ πέμψω ὑμῖν παρὰ τοῦ πατρός, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας ὃ παρὰ τοῦ πατρός ἐκπορεύεται, ἐκεῖνος μαρτυρήσει περὶ ἐμοῦ. ²⁷ καὶ ὑμεῖς δὲ μαρτυρεῖτε, ὅτι ἀπ' ἀρχῆς μετ' ἐμοῦ ἐστε.

^{16:4b} Ταῦτα δὲ ὑμῖν ἐξ ἀρχῆς οὐκ εἶπον, ὅτι μεθ' ὑμῶν ἤμην. ⁵ Νῦν δὲ ὑπάγω πρὸς τὸν πέμψαντα με, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐξ ὑμῶν ἐρωτᾷ με· ποῦ ὑπάγεις; ⁶ ἀλλ' ὅτι ταῦτα λελάληκα ὑμῖν ἡ λύπη πεπλήρωκεν ὑμῶν τὴν καρδίαν. ⁷ ἀλλ' ἐγὼ τὴν ἀλήθειαν λέγω ὑμῖν, συμφέρει ὑμῖν ἵνα ἐγὼ ἀπέλθω. ἐὰν γὰρ μὴ ἀπέλθω, ὁ παράκλητος οὐκ ἐλεύσεται πρὸς ὑμᾶς· ἐὰν δὲ πορευθῶ, πέμψω αὐτὸν πρὸς ὑμᾶς. ⁸ καὶ ἐλθὼν ἐκεῖνος ἐλέγξει τὸν κόσμον περὶ ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ περὶ κρίσεως. ⁹ περὶ ἁμαρτίας μὲν, ὅτι οὐ πιστεύουσιν εἰς ἐμέ. ¹⁰ περὶ δικαιοσύνης δέ, ὅτι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ὑπάγω καὶ οὐκέτι θεωρεῖτε με. ¹¹ περὶ δὲ κρίσεως, ὅτι ὁ ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου κέκριται.

¹² Ἐτι πολλὰ ἔχω ὑμῖν λέγειν, ἀλλ' οὐ δύνασθε βαστάζειν ἄρτι. ¹³ ὅταν δὲ ἔλθῃ ἐκεῖνος, τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας, ὀδηγήσει ὑμᾶς ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ πάση· οὐ γὰρ λαλήσει ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ, ἀλλ' ὅσα ἀκούσει λαλήσει καὶ τὰ ἐρχόμενα ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν. ¹⁴ ἐκεῖνος ἐμέ δοξάσει, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ ἐμοῦ λήμψεται καὶ ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν. ¹⁵ πάντα ὅσα ἔχει ὁ πατὴρ ἐμά ἐστιν· διὰ τοῦτο εἶπον ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ ἐμοῦ λαμβάνει καὶ ἀναγγελεῖ ὑμῖν. ⁱⁱⁱ

First Lesson: English Text

^{2.1} When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ² 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. ³ Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴ All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

⁵ Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. ⁶ And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. ⁷ Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" ⁸ And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? ⁹ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰ Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹ Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." ¹² All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" ¹³ But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

¹⁴ But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. ¹⁵ Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. ¹⁶ No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ¹⁷ '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 men shall see visions, and your old men

ⁱⁱ John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15, *New Revised Version Bible* (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

ⁱⁱⁱ John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15, *The Greek New Testament*, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).

shall dream dreams. ¹⁸ Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. ¹⁹ And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰ The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. ²¹ Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' " ^{iv}

First Lesson: Greek Text

¹ Καὶ ἐν τῷ συμπληροῦσθαι τὴν ἡμέραν τῆς πεντηκοστῆς ἦσαν πάντες ὁμοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτό. ² καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἦχος σπερ φερομένης πνοῆς βιαίας καὶ ἐπλήρωσεν ὁ οἶκος οὗ ἦσαν καθήμενοι ³ καὶ φθῆσαν αὐτοῖς διαμεριζόμεναι γλῶσσαι ὡσεὶ πυρὸς καὶ ἐκάθισεν ἐφ' ἓνα καστον αὐτῶν, ⁴ καὶ ἐπλήσθησαν πάντες πνεύματος ἁγίου καὶ ῥῆξαντο λαλεῖν ἑτέροις γλώσσαις καθὼς τὸ πνεῦμα ἐδίδου ἀποφθέγγεσθαι αὐτοῖς.

⁵ Ἦσαν δὲ εἰς Ἱερουσαλὴμ κατοικοῦντες Ἰουδαῖοι, ἄνδρες εὐλαβεῖς ἀπὸ παντὸς ἔθνους τῶν ὑπὸ τὸν οὐρανόν. ⁶ γενομένης δὲ τῆς φωνῆς ταύτης συνήλθεν τὸ πλῆθος καὶ συνεχύθη, ὅτι κουν εἰς καστος τῆ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ λαλοῦντων αὐτῶν. ⁷ ἐξίσταντο δὲ καὶ ἐθαύμαζον λέγοντες· οὐχ ἰδοὺ παντες οὗτοι εἰσιν οἱ λαλοῦντες Γαλιλαῖοι; ⁸ καὶ πῶς ἡμεῖς ἀκούομεν καστος τῆ ἰδίᾳ διαλέκτῳ ἡμῶν ἐν ᾗ ἐγεννήθημεν; ⁹ Πάρθοι καὶ Μῆδοι καὶ Ἑλαμίται καὶ οἱ κατοικοῦντες τὴν Μεσοποταμίαν, Ἰουδαίαν τε καὶ Καππαδοκίαν, Πόντον καὶ τὴν Ἀσίαν, ¹⁰ Φρυγίαν τε καὶ Παμφυλίαν, Αἰγύπτου καὶ τὰ μέρη τῆς Λιβύης τῆς κατὰ Κυρήνην, καὶ οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες Ῥωμαῖοι, ¹¹ Ἰουδαῖοι τε καὶ προσήλυτοι, Κρήτες καὶ Ἄραβες, ἀκούομεν λαλοῦντων αὐτῶν ταῖς ἡμετέροις γλώσσαις τὰ μεγαλῆα τοῦ θεοῦ. ¹² ἐξίσταντο δὲ πάντες καὶ διηπόρουν, ἄλλος πρὸς ἄλλον λέγοντες· τί θέλει τοῦτο εἶναι; ¹³ ἕτεροι δὲ διαχλευάζοντες λεγον τι γλεύκουσ μεμεστωμένοι εἰσιν.

¹⁴ Σταθεῖς δὲ ὁ Πέτρος σὺν τοῖς ἑδέκα ἐπῆρεν τὴν φωνὴν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀπεφθέγγετο αὐτοῖς, ἄνδρες Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οἱ κατοικοῦντες Ἱερουσαλὴμ πάντες, τοῦτο ὑμῖν γνωστὸν ἴστω καὶ ἐνωτίσασθε τὰ ῥήματα μου. ¹⁵ οὐ γὰρ ὡς ὑμεῖς ὑπολαμβάνετε οὗτοι μεθύουσιν, ἔστιν γὰρ ῥα τρίτη τῆς ἡμέρας, ¹⁶ ἀλλὰ τοῦτο ἔστιν τὸ εἰρημένον διὰ τοῦ προφήτου Ἰωήλ ¹⁷ καὶ ἔσται ἐν ταῖς ἐσχάταις ἡμέραις, λέγει ὁ θεός, ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος μου ἐπὶ πᾶσαν σάρκα, καὶ προφητεῦσουσιν οἱ υἱοὶ ὑμῶν καὶ αἰθυγατέρες ὑμῶν καὶ οἱ νεανίσκοι ὑμῶν ὄρασις ψονται καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι ὑμῶν ἐνυπνίου ἐνυπνιασθήσονται ¹⁸ καὶ γε ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους μου καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας μου ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος μου, καὶ προφητεῦσουσιν. ¹⁹ καὶ δώσω τέρατα ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ ἔνω καὶ σημεῖα ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς κάτω, αἶμα καὶ πῦρ καὶ ἀτμίδα καπνοῦ. ²⁰ ὁ ἥλιος μεταστραφήσεται εἰς σκότος καὶ ἡ σελήνη εἰς αἶμα, πρὶν ἔλθῃν ἡμέραν κυρίου τὴν μεγάλην καὶ ἐπιφανῆ. ²¹ καὶ ἔσται πᾶς ὁ σὺν ἐπικαλέσεται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου σωθήσεται. ^v

^{iv} Acts 2:1-21, *New Revised Version Bible* (© 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America).

^v Acts 2:1-21, *The Greek New Testament*, Aland, Kurt, Black, Matthew, Martini, Carlo M., Metzger, Bruce M., and Wikgren, Allen, (© 1983, Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft Stuttgart).