

Stretching, Propelling Spirit-Wind

Acts 1:12-14; 2:1-18

Sermon by Mag Richer Smith

Pentecost, May 20, 2018

12Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey away. 13When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying, Peter, and John, and James, and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James son of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James. 14All these were constantly devoting themselves to prayer, together with certain women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, as well as his brothers.

2When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

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

14But 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. 15Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 16No, 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 shall dream dreams. 18Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

PENTECOST

*"Build the Wall! " Build the wall!
Keep the segregating lines clear.
Know who is IN and who is OUT.
Know who is welcome and who is not.*

But "something there is that doesn't love a wall" ...

*I think it's called the Holy Spirit...
THE Spirit of our WALL-WRECKING MESSIAH...
The one who breaks down walls of hostility
And brings the world together in Peace.*

That SPIRIT comes to an upper room today
to the walled-up lives of Jesus followers...

The Spirit that *hovered over chaos* at the beginning
Bringing order and beauty,
The Spirit that *breathed life* into humankind
The Spirit that desires nothing more than wholeness and
unity...

Today that Spirit will *propel* Jesus' followers out to the streets
of chaos and division
with new possibilities for change, transformation, and
reconciliation.
This is the day Walls come down!

Richard Rohr says there are 3 things that the Holy Spirit
cannot build upon: *FEAR, GUILT AND ANGER*.
And the disciples have had lots of these ...
Ever since their leader has been arrested and executed.
their lives have been *completely disoriented*.
How does one go on when one loses so much?

And in addition they are *shaking in their boots*
frozen in their sandals...
Their own well-being is being threatened like never before.
And Fear's prevailing words are so CAUTIOUS:
" *Be careful. Don't risk. Stay Safe.*"

And I think we can hear their GUILT too...
" *IF only* we had stayed away from Jerusalem
If only we had known what Judas was scheming.
If only we had not deserted him.
We should have been smarter.

We should have seen what was coming.
We should have defended him.

The Accuser is right there in that room with all the
“*IF only’s* “and “*should’s...*”
reminding them of all they are NOT
and of all they’ve done wrong.

And there are lots of reasons to be Angry.
(I am personally fond of anger...
Because it can propel me to action...
But the anger that *stifles the Spirit* is not the indignation at
injustice that calls us to act!)...
The ANGER that *stymies the Spirit* is that chip we carry on our
shoulders and that cage we carry in our hearts
Where we keep somebody in prison and periodically *BANG*
on those bars
And we don’t let go and we don’t forgive.
Because there is always somebody else to BLAME for our
pain:
It’s YOUR fault!
You did this!
You caused this!
You make me so mad!

Anger points the finger at a “*YOU*” ...
and often that *YOU* gets *projected in the wrong places*.

And with all that has happened, the disciples have PLENTY
of people to blame.

But here they are today in an UPPER ROOM with Jesus’
Mother and other women and friends who followed Jesus.

And they have gathered together *not knowing how to go on...* the walls of inner resistance have been thick with: fear, guilt & anger.

SO HOW does PENTECOST happen?

Well it begins with that *HOLY LONGING...*
And desire for *MORE OF GOD* and communion with Jesus.
The people gathered in that room are WAITING...
sitting at a TABLE sharing food,
rehearsing stories about Jesus,
singing songs of their faith,
and having conversations to discern and strategize
where we go from here.
AND guess what?
The Spirit hovering over them is WAITING too.
Waiting to *help* them lay their ANGRY weapons down,
Waiting to *fill* them with a LOVE bigger than all their fears
And waiting to *RELEASE* the heavy weight of their guilt.
...Wanting to teach us all to love like Jesus loves...and
move free.

And it is as close as BREATH.
THE HOLY SPIRIT just NEEDS an open door
to *break through the walls*
of resistance
Maybe just a crack for the light to get through will do.

PENTECOST BEGINS WITH waiting.
And it begins with PRAYER...

Yesterday our brother Roy Bergey buried his second wife... a second victim of cancer. Yesterday in the early morning before Barbara's funeral,
Roy wrote on *caring bridge*:

"I don't know how I will go on...but I am going to try Barbara's morning routine. Get up early. Light a candle at the kitchen table. Read from her books and bible. Listen to the morning sounds in the darkness of chirping birds, passing geese and silence."

THIS is where Pentecost begins. It begins with a *longing to draw near...to be companioned* by the SPIRT of love... To light a candle and listen in the silence and WAIT.

Pentecost courage and freedom BEGINS
With sitting still and praying what we've already prayed this morning.

"IF you believe and I believe and we together PRAY...the Holy Spirit must come down and set God's people free.. Because Nothing is lost on the breath of God" ...

What happens in that upper room?

THE PEOPLE there ask for Jesus to come again IN THEM.
They ask for Jesus' presence and empowerment.
They wait for Jesus' light and leading
And they desire (above all else) to learn to love like Jesus loves.

Come, they pray,
Spirit of the living God, and fall afresh on us.
Come, Holy Spirit, descend on us...melt, mold, fill & use us!

What a risky prayer!

Because the waiting Spirit always answers this prayer with a YES... a YES that will transform us & fill us with God's breath.

PRAYING FOR the Holy Spirit to descend invites CHANGE.

The Spirit of the Living God will not leave us or our community or this planet the same as we were.

IT is always, always making new.

And it won't let those disciples *hover* behind their walls of resistance anymore.

IT won't let the Church stand still!

or the Nation return to how it used to be.

Last week when Richard Aguirre gave us information about how we can be advocates for our immigrant sisters and brothers in this town, he said,

"The most important thing is to PRAY."

Prayer will not let us remain passive or apathetic.

To pray for the Spirit to descend on us is a most POTENT PRAYER... that GOD ALWAYS answers with: YES!

Devoting themselves to prayer takes those disciples to Yes... and a *Holy Hurricane* propels these people *dancing* onto the street.

Shy people become bold,

and scared people become gutsy,

and when they open their mouths, they sound like Jesus.

When they lay their hands on people,

Jesus' love touches them.

Jesus is alive in them. Resurrection is real!

They have sucked in God's own breath and are *transformed by it!*

The fear, anger, guilt that keep us distant from one another is burned away.

The DIVISIONS of culture, race, ethnicity and language are transcended,
and people are united by a common tongue,
and it sounds like and looks like Jesus and his love.

The Holy Spirit always, always points us to the self-giving, non-violent WAY of Jesus, and it always seeks shalom, wholeness and liberation.. And it *propels us* to risk everything out of gratitude for the grace we have received.

International peace negotiator and professor of peace studies at Notre Dame, John Paul Lederach, has a favorite hymn. Growing up both his dad and uncle told him it was the greatest hymn in the hymnal, and as a teenager, John Paul says,

"The words of this hymn leapt out and gripped my conscience."

The hymn?

**God of Grace and God of Glory,
on your people pour your power
Grant us wisdom and grant us courage...**

Lederach says, *"I had no idea how this hymn had been ingrained in my psyche until I was walking in the murky soils of war and violence."*

As Lederach worked for the peace process in Nicaragua over 25 years ago (between the Indigenous Resistance and

the Sandinista Govt.) he came under increasing pressure to HALT his work.

The pressure included *the threat of kidnapping* his young daughter! So he moved his wife and daughter out of the country.

But the threats continued...this time it was the *threat of assassination*...his assassination. At a meeting in a hotel he learned that those who had a contract on his life had entered the building.

“Fear? (of course) My palms were sweating and my heart was beating hard and my thoughts were banging in every direction. I left out the back door of the hotel and walked down the street with a friend named Faroan who said only, ‘I am very afraid for you and your family.’

We walked in silence. I could not even think.

Then out of the blue, without saying a word, Faroan began whistling “GOD OF GRACE AND GOD OF GLORY.”

We had never talked about this song.

He had no idea what it meant for me.

But he whistled it all the way across town to the office.

And I knew.

I saw.

I recognized that

the air blowing through his lips was the VERY BREATH OF GOD!

That same breath is whistling over us right here at Berkeley Avenue Mennonite Fellowship, *inviting* us to hear the music, feel the wind, see the flame, & receive the love!

And the SPIRIT is READY...longing to offer us wisdom and courage... for the facing of this hour in our families and our congregation, in the broader church and in the world...
Wisdom and Courage...
for breaking through walls of resistance inside us,
and for knocking down dividing walls of hostility everywhere.

The Spirit is longing to pour its power into us
and deepen our TRUST!

It is Pentecost.
It is not the Day the Spirit first arrived on earth.
The Holy Spirit was here long before the creation.

But Pentecost is the day the disciples stopped fleeing and opened the door to its propelling wind...
let it envelop them, *fill* them, & *propel* them outward.

It is the day the Holy Comforter whistled fresh courage into their hearts and reassured them that the Living God is as close as breath.

It is the day walls collapsed...

Because Jesus' followers PRAYED with all their hearts:

God of grace and God of Glory,
on your people POUR your power!

And God always says *YES!*