

Earth, Wind and Fire

Scripture: Act 2:1-21

(preached on May 19, 2024- Pentecost Sunday)

It was quite a day !! The standard Pentecost celebration- originally a harvest festival- happened in Jerusalem every year for as long as anyone could remember, but this time it was different, disrupted, way out of control.

From heaven there came a sound like a howling hurricane, and it filled the house where the disciples were gathered. Then flames appeared over their heads, and they spoke in languages that were not their own. Foreigners from all around the Mediterranean could understand these simple fishermen from Galilee. What did this mean?

The crowd was Bewildered Amazed Astonished
Confused Perplexed ... **and** there were some who were annoyed and shocked. Those offended people accused the disciples of being drunk!
“Such outlandish behavior ! And On a holy day...what is this world coming to?”

But in reality this disturbance was not unexpected. Long ago, the prophet Joel had said that God would pour out the divine spirit on all people – even women and children and the enslaved and the elderly-- all of them dreaming and having visions and prophesying. Now it has come true.

The disciples at least, should have seen this coming. Jesus had promised his followers that they would be baptized by fire; that he would send the Spirit of truth, who would guide them and declare the things that are to come and prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment. Now it has come true.

The fire and the wind certainly got everyone’s attention on Pentecost. They still do today as we follow the news of volcanoes in Indonesia, the Philippines, Iceland and other places. Tornados in the south and Midwest portions of the US make the headlines. These dramatic events catch and hold our attention even if only for a little while.

That’s why I decided to call this sermon “Earth, Wind and Fire” !! because for people of a certain age that title has the power to bring back memories of

the music and spirit of another era. 'Earth, Wind and Fire' are still lighting up the music world with their unique mix of jazz, R & B, disco, and soul. This summer 'Earth, Wind, & Fire' will be touring with Lionel Richie and Chicago.

But back to Pentecost ! Earth, wind and fire are basic elements with extraordinary power for creation and destruction. The Earth is our home and keeps us grounded, but it can shake and quake and flood. The wind can cool us on hot day **or** blow buildings off their very foundations. And fire – fire keeps us warm in winter, purifies gold, cooks our food. **And** fire can destroy.

The Christian church was born in the fire of Pentecost. It was exhilarating and frightening, but definitely life-changing. The followers of Jesus were empowered by the Spirit to take his message beyond the comfort zone of their tiny country. Their hearts burned within them, burned with love and passion for their friend and savior. The wind of the Spirit filled their lungs so they could communicate with people to the ends of the earth and for countless generations. People were energized to tell the glorious deeds of God to all who would listen.

We can live by that same power. **This** is the day of Pentecost – it is not ancient history. The spirit of Christ is here for us today. **NOW** the Spirit is moving and calling to young and old, men and women, free and enslaved and imprisoned.

One of my most spiritual experiences happened as I led worship on a Sunday afternoon inside a federal prison in Pennsylvania. The Holy Spirit was not deterred by razor wire or cement cinderblock walls or the absence of windows. The fire of the Spirit, the breath of life, was present and powerful that Sunday as we called upon the name of the Lord, brothers and sister in Christ.

Today is Pentecost – not a memory but a promise. Come, Holy Spirit, Come. By the power of the Holy Spirit we hear the glorious deeds of God today, thousands of years after those first disciples, thousands of miles away from Jerusalem. It is still amazing and astonishing that in our own English language we hear the deeds of God and the good news of Jesus Christ.

The Christian church was born in the fire of Pentecost. It was exhilarating and frightening, but definitely life-changing. **The church** today can live by that same power. I admit that sometimes the mainline Protestant Church seems

to be uncomfortable with talk about the Holy Spirit. It might seem old-fashioned or 'new agey.' Perhaps we've seen or heard about 'Pentecostal' services, and we are just not interested in all that chaos. But honestly, I fear that we are not interested in giving up control. This is a congregational church after all and the power is in our hands, isn't it?

Maybe – maybe not... But **the spirit is not just** fire and smoke and noise! The Spirit comes with many and diverse gifts and fruits for the church – wisdom, truth, courage, comfort, love, unity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, self-control - to name a few.

To avoid the Holy spirit, or just to tip our hat in acknowledgement with a song or two, is to miss out on a tremendous gift. To rely only on our own energy and intellect is to limit the church to human resources. And then what makes us any different from other social/and social service agencies?

Jesus, the living and loving Spirit of Jesus, is the unending and unlimited source of our message, our life, our energy. What keeps us from tapping into that power?

Sometimes as dedicated Church folk we don't want to 'bother God' with the messy details of church life. Too often we have the attitude – "I got this, God" No worries ...it's all good..." Sometimes hardworking pillars of the church suffer from burn out by trying to generate energy on our own, so why turn away from the power of the Holy Spirit ?

Just as the disciples did, the church still needs the wind of the Spirit, the fire of love, to give us life when we are out of breath.

So...Come, Holy Spirit, come. It's a simple prayer.

I encourage you to say it, as a church, as disciples of Christ.

Come, Holy Spirit, come. There will be a powerful answer.

Rev. Barbara Kershner