

Pentecost... It was a time special celebration for the Jewish people,. It was 50 days after the Passover, which celebrates the Exodus of Jewish slaves from Egypt. It may be like a fulfillment or continuation of Passover. It is about 7 weeks later, (or a week of weeks), so it has been sometimes called the festival of weeks. It celebrates a wheat harvest, yet, also, Jews celebrate the Giving of the Torah, the Book of the Law, to Moses on Mount Sinai. Apparently followers of Jesus still celebrated this day, yet with them, there was a rush of wind, and something like tongues of fire dancing on people's heads, and speaking in foreign tongues, all evidences of a great outpouring of Spirit, Divine spirit, Holy Spirit! Christians have called the day Pentacost, "Penta" meaning 50, as in Pentagon. I could say, "wish I were there to see and hear it all firsthand, but also, it could be rather scary!"

What part of the story can we relate to most? Some modern scholars like Diana Butler Bass point out the social justice aspect of the story: that all these nations present (people from all over the Middle East... Israel, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, etc.) were subjects of Rome, so their free and jubilant praise of God, in the Spirit of Jesus, was like an act of rebellion against Roman occupiers, the Roman oppressors - a cry for liberation. Peter urged them by saying "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." Too exclusively, Christians often think "being saved" means being saved from personal sin and the possibility of not going to heaven. The speaking in foreign languages part was about Thanksgiving and Praise! "We hear them speaking about God's deeds and power." It was a universal spirit being expressed for liberation, not only personally, but from the Roman Empire. Rome built a world based on war and oppression.

Whether for personal liberation, or societal liberation, how do we praise our saving, liberating God? Perhaps we praise best with songs in our hymnals. Perhaps we enjoy the lyrics of the hymns, rather than ecstatic prayer where we each make up our own words. If we say God is with us,

we each still have to find things we can relate to. I told the Bible class this past week that the biggest church display I ever saw on Pentecost was a Presbyterian church in MD whose pastor was a sailor on the Chesapeake Bay. Well, he brought in a large red sail, and hung it from the ceiling! The sail was not flapping or luffing in any “rush of wind,” but it sure was memorable as an image, as an analogy, so we could all at least think about the way the Holy spirit seem to “blow” into our lives. It reminds me of another phrase in the Bible that says “the Spirit blows where it wills,” as if to say that the Spirit of God is unpredictable to us, but surely noticeable by its sound or by things that sway in a breeze.

I think is easy to identify with the part of the Pentecost reading we heard this morning the part about visions and dreams: “your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams.” One of our newer Pentecost songs says, “our women see visions, our men clear their eyes!” The Bible verse is clear that the Spirit of God is to be “poured out on ALL flesh,” all sexes, all ages, etc! ... and that EVERYONE that calls on *the name of the Lord* will be saved. Yes, we often interpret this on the personal individual level, but let’s remember that the list of all the nations present and Peter saying “Save yourself from this corrupt generation” implies a “fire of anti-imperialism, a burning faith for resistance against militarism, ethnic superiority and economic injustice” (Diana Butler Bass). The power of the spirit in Acts Chapter 2 is societal as much or more than personal.

With a huge prayer for more freedom in oppressed societies... I now return to the personal relevance, as in our final song, “Every Time I Feel the Spirit!” I see in the Pentecost story a posture of dependence, the need to ask for help, help from God, help from others. It is an attitude of humility also. It is acknowledging that we are not in control of everything in our lives and in the world. The more we call on the great Creator God, and Christ, the more we are likely to have visions and dreams that align us

with all that is good, and peace and love. The Psalm for this morning, Psalm 104 expresses this so well, that The LORD, or God the Creator, made all things on earth and sea... that we find amazing, beyond anything we could ever make or manufacture. ... Psalm 104 is worthy of reading a bit more, and out loud, as some worship leaders insist... out loud, with enjoyment and amazement! We only heard a small snippet of it this morning, so here is a bit more: (Read more verses of Psalm 104...). It is the insistence of the songwriter that Creation happens by God sending forth Spirit! Surely this Spring we are all amazed at the way things spring forth with green everywhere, songbirds singing everywhere, flowers and bushes with amazing colors! And the Psalm speaks of God giving all creatures “their food in due season!”

OK, I think we are all on the same page with Nature being so amazing, beyond our creative abilities, beyond our comprehension. The more our appreciation and awe for nature grows, the more we will care for our earth and environment. And then, if we can translate this appreciation of nature into our human lives and the way we treat one another! Perhaps praising the wonders of nature can help us praise the wonders of one another! Perhaps respecting the uniqueness of all the birds and flowers can help us see the uniqueness of each human being.

Yes, we do not understand some of the destructive aspects of nature. We do not understand fully the sources of hurricanes and tornadoes, nor fires that get out of control and cause destruction. But such storms do make us appreciate the usual “order” of nature, the overall harmony and beauty in nature..... Can we extrapolate to humans? Again, we do not fully understand what makes some human beings violent or murderous; we do not fully understand our own temptations to lash out, to hurt. And we know that we must put a stop to any behaviors that offend or hurt others.

But I believe it holds true that thanksgiving and praise (prayer) can only form us more into God's image, transform us into more goodness, more peace, more love. So we can start with praise/thanks for the wonders of Creation that we see in Nature, easy to do at Springtime festivals, and let that lead us into praise and thanksgiving for our friends and neighbors, giving them as much respect and honor as we can.

I was going to close with a song sung by our friend Charlie (the clammer), but alas, he has had some economic and health misfortunes recently and is not able to make it. Charlie has always sung songs of faith, STARTING with NATURE... and yes, it can be harder to be thankful and praising when our human lives face much hardship. Yet in a way, the trials or hardships of life can actually remind us of our limits, and of One Who is Greater, of a power beyond ourselves. One of Charlie's good ol' songs of faith starts this way: "Who made the mountains, who made the trees, who made the rivers that run to the sea..... somebody bigger than you and me!"... perfectly echoing the message of Nature in Psalm 104 this morning.

So let's look for God's Spirit everywhere... perhaps easiest to see in Nature, at Springtime.. such beauty, such a creation *beyond* anything we could ever imagine or do! Also in the midst of our daily lives, what dreams and visions begin to implant themselves on our minds? What dreams and visions do we have for a world *beyond* our current reality, a world saved from this "corrupt generation?" God is pouring out God's spirit on ALL flesh, and that means all of us... We can keep our focus on a new world, a better way, and be free to speak of it, free to work for it! Amen.