

PENTECOST! The Holy Spirit of God as a rush of wind, and “electric” flames of fire dancing above heads. Many refer to Pentecost as the birth of the church (Let’s hope so... rebirth!) Pentecost does not get as much attention as Christmas or Easter, but the Holy Spirit is a key part of the Christian story, so we try to observe Pentecost in some memorable ways. When I was teaching Spanish, I attended a Presbyterian church near Annapolis MD, where the pastor was a sailor... so one year at Pentecost, they hung a huge Red sail from the ceiling! Memorable! In my early years here, one year in the Meetinghouse next door, we hung Red and orange streamers from every chandelier, and had fans on the sides blowing them all around! Memorable! Recently, we have hung a few red/orange streamers to our lights in this little chapel, and these days, we are just glad if a few people wear something Red!

Theologically speaking, is the Holy Spirit available only to Christians? Doubtful... because being the very Spirit of God, Creator of the world, it must have *universal* overtones, the Divine Spirit that was in the world since the beginning of time. Paul’s letter says “it is the *same God* who activates gifts of the Spirit *in everyone.*” And yet a case can also be made that the Spirit is more specific to Jesus; since so few people seem to “get it” over the ages, God sent the Spirit *fully* in Jesus of Nazareth, and then Jesus found a way to send the Spirit to us more powerfully, as he said he would, starting with Pentecost. Sadly there was a big controversy among early Christian churches about whether the Holy Spirit comes from just the Father, or also from the son...and sadly it was one debate that helped divide the Eastern Orthodox churches from the Western Roman churches.

So what is the Holy Spirit? Obviously it can’t be defined in just a *few* words. From the Acts Chapter 2 account of that first

Pentecost, a few key words would be Praise, Dreams, and Visions... *Praise* is a primary expression of Divine Spirit... Thankfulness, as the first word of prayer! At the first Pentecost it was said that everyone heard Praise for God's "deeds of power" in their own native language. Can we try a little bit of that right now? I'll start in English, add some Spanish, then let's hear languages! ... *Glory be to God!* Now, a blessing: the simple word *Peace!*... and how about Goodbye, *God bye ye!*

Acts Chapter 2 quotes the prophet Joel and mentions *dreams and visions!* I sometimes forget which apply to the old and which to the young!... Oh yes: "*your old (men) will dream dreams, and your young (men) will see visions!*" Of course it's not just the ordinary dreams of sleep, but dreams like that of Martin Luther King Jr. in his "I have a dream" speech! Divine or Prophetic dreams are for a better world, a "world where there is justice and everyone is free" (our final song by Bryan Sirchio).

I love the description of the Spirit in the letter to the Galatians, chapter 5. We have this lovely wall hanging (hold it up), found by Jean K, I think, that names some "fruits of the Spirit." Surely there are many more, but Paul mentions nine: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. And we remember from the reading this morning that we all do not have the same gifts. The Same Spirit gives *different gifts* to different people. Jean K was funny about it: She said, "I like the saying, but I surely don't have that last gift!"

Each of these nine fruits of the Spirit could of course be a separate sermon, but for now, I'll make one comment on each word... **Love:** not just a feeling, but an action, a way of serving. **Joy,** seems a bit out of reach often, but it can surprise us, especially near children or kittens! **Peace:** again, not just total calm,

but often a conflict resolution, peace *with justice*. **Patience:** remember that some translations say long-suffering! **Kindness:** At most weddings we hear the famous words of 1Cor.13, “love is patient, love is kind.” **Goodness:** one of my favorite synonyms for God, *Good morning, Good day, Good bye!* **Faithfulness:** Results never guaranteed, but as Hebrews 11 says, “Faith is the conviction of things not seen. **Gentleness:** Yes, the rush of the wind was powerful that first Pentecost day, but mostly God comes to us as a Spirit of Gentleness, never forcing Godself on anyone; that’s why manipulative tracts and cults are dangerous to vulnerable people. **Self-control:** James spoke about taming of the tongue... and the Bible speaks in several places about God being “slow to anger.”

One of the gifts not mentioned by Paul in Galatians Chapter 5, is the gift of **Truth-telling**. In 1Corinthians 12, Paul mentions the gift of “prophecy.” Prophets of old were truth-tellers. Filled with the Spirit, empowered by the Spirit, they would challenge and chastise the Israelite kings with the truth... often saying that they were doing things like making palaces for themselves while oppressing and having no care for the poor. The kings would then punish such prophets... Sound familiar?

I’ll close with a story told by a professor I had at Princeton Seminary. He tells of UCC pastor Lilian Daniel, who was involved in a protest against unfair labor practices, a peaceful protest, with Lilian most likely wearing clergy garb. Nevertheless, she got arrested and locked in the back of a police van. The policeman assigned to guard her looked through a small window and apologized for her treatment, and said he was sorry he had to be the one to do it. Rev. Lilian asked him, why are you in this field if you dislike it so much? “ Well, I fell into it after the military, only two

more years til retirement. But I just want to tell you how nice your voices sounded when you were singing Amazing Grace. You'll get out of here soon," he said. *You will too, she said!*

They connected at the level of the Spirit, at the level of kindness, compassion and grace. The Holy Spirit is indeed available to all. The fruits of the Spirit are good and they are many! Love and Kindness CAN spread anywhere... Jesus spoke of seeds that we can plant, and that they can spread 10 fold, 100 fold! They comfort us, then they challenge us to sow the seeds in other places. The guard over Rev. Lilian obviously felt the beauty and comfort of their singing as they prayed and sang for mistreated laborers.

It seems to me that similar things are happening these days. When I was at the Burlington Homeland Security building, also called the Burlington "Detention Center," I learned that a guard at the front door was usually friendly and kind to the clergy who gather near the entrance to give comfort and prayers. He would not even say hello to me. I heard that if his supervisor were on the grounds, the guard would turn cold and harsh to us, strictly enforcing a distance. We know that the detention centers can be cruel, while the pay, the salary, for officers and guards is quite high! We recall that Jesus did say, we cannot serve God and money; one will take the lead.

We are called to spread the Holy Spirit, a spirit of comfort and power: Comfort in the beauty of music, comfort as love, and serving with gentleness. But also the spirit of power: to do our best to speak the truth to all, especially to those in power, the truth that Jesus says can set people free. Amen.