

Recognize the Holy Spirit

Pentecost ~ May 27, 2007

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Acts 2:1-21

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 and women 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. ¹⁹And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. ²⁰The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the great and glorious day of our God. ²¹Then everyone who calls on the name of our God shall be saved.’

John 14: 15 - 27

¹⁵“If you love me and obey my commandments I will ask the One who sent me to give you another Paraclete, another Advocate, another Helper to be with you always. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees nor recognizes this Spirit. You can recognize the Spirit, because this Spirit abides with you and will be within you.

¹⁸“I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live. ²⁰On that day you will know that I am in God, and you are in me, and I am in you. ²¹Those who have my commandments and keep them are the ones who love me; and those who love me will be loved by God, and I will love them and reveal myself to them.” ²²Judas (not Iscariot) said to Jesus, “Rabbi, how is it that you will reveal yourself to us, and not to the world?” ²³Jesus answered, “Those who love me will be true to my word, and God will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. ²⁴Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from God who sent me.

²⁵“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, whom God will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ²⁷Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

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It is Pentecost, the 50th day after Easter, the day of the Holy Spirit.

Our readings abound in descriptions of the Holy Spirit. There is wind. There is noise that filled the house where the disciples were sitting. There is fire and the gift of tongues. The streets are filled with believers speaking in many different languages. People are ecstatic. They are accused of being drunk with wine. It is Peter who interprets the scene. “Listen to what I have to say. People aren’t drunk, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy. God has promised us that God will pour out God’s Spirit on all of God’s people!”

Later, looking back on that moment in time, Jesus followers would realize that what Jesus had promised them had also been fulfilled. “The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom God will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.”

On Pentecost, scripture was fulfilled and the Holy Spirit descended. It is God’s gift to us. Last week, we heard about how Jesus ascended. Today we are reminded of how the Holy Spirit descended. Jesus does not appear any more. But the Holy Spirit remains forever.

Joseph Donders, in a commentary about Pentecost, invites us to remember that the Spirit continues to remain in the humdrum of our daily lives, hidden and most times unnoticed by us. But then he notes that being not noticed does not mean not being there! (Joseph Donders, *Beyond Jesus*, pp.154-159)

Think, for a moment, about all of the experiences that we have without ever noticing them. There is our breathing that goes on in us all the time. For a moment, become aware of your breathing. Watch your breath. Is it very fast? Can you slow it down? Is it superficial? Can you make it deeper? For a moment, simply breath and become aware of something that is, for the most part, unnoticed. In and out. Life giving breath.

Then there is hearing that goes on in us all the time. Become aware of your hearing. Close your eyes, if you are comfortable doing that, and listen to every noise you hear. Let those noises penetrate you deeply and freely. Be aware of your hearing, which is, for the most part, unnoticed.

Then there are physical sensations that we are feeling all the time but that often go unnoticed. Again, close your eyes and this time feel the clothes on your shoulders, or the shoes on your feet. Feel your back touching the pew and where your hands are resting. Become aware of places of tension in your body. Breath. Can you feel or hear your own heart beat in the quiet of simply being?

Without some concentration, the presence of the Holy Spirit will remain as unnoticed to us as our breathing, our hearing, our physical sensations. I want to ask you to concentrate for a moment on where and when and how you experience the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Let me help you by looking into scripture and naming some of functions of the Holy Spirit. Remember, the Spirit does what Jesus did in his earthly ministry. And the Spirit does it as God with us and for us forever.

Jesus promised that after his ascension, God would send us an Advocate, a Counselor, a Comforter, a Helper. The word in Greek is *paraclete* whose basic meaning is “one called to the side of another” who then counsels, exhorts, strengthens and comforts the other. (*Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3, p. 654) In ancient time, if you helped someone in need, you were known as a “paraclete.” A physician or a nurse at the bedside of a patient is a paraclete. A preacher who brings listeners a word of encouragement is a paraclete. A counselor-at-law who defends a client is a paraclete. Jesus himself was a paraclete, a present help in time of trouble. He was the Great Physician; he was the encouraging Word of God in the flesh; he came to heal, to help, to save. And when his earthly life is over, the Holy Spirit descends and becomes the revealer of Christ, being present at the side of all of Jesus followers. The Holy Spirit is Jesus’ indwelling spirit within each of us, teaching us everything and reminding us of what Jesus said to us during his days on earth.

So, now, when and where and how have you experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit? When did you notice the work of the Holy Spirit in yourself or in others around you? Like breathing and hearing and feeling physical sensations, we have to concentrate to recognize the ever present power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

(Witnesses are given by members of the congregation.)

Did you ever do anything really good? Or did someone ever do anything really good to you? Whenever we do something good, wherever there is a kind deed or an act of love or caring, it is the work of the Holy Spirit within us.

Jesus also said that the Spirit will bring us peace, a peace that goes beyond all understanding. This Spirit will quell our fears. It will comfort and sustain us. Have you ever experienced that peace? that indwelling comfort?

Today is Pentecost.

The wind that blew on the first Pentecost ceased, though it blows sometimes still among us, thank God.

The flames of fire on that first Pentecost were extinguished, though sometimes we still feel our hearts strangely warmed, thank God.

The cacophony of languages quieted, though sometimes we still understand others who have different ideas, different thoughts, different perspectives than our own, thank God.

God and Jesus sent us the gift of the Holy Spirit. It was a gift that will last forever. But like our breath, like our hearing, like physical sensations, we often do not even notice that it is with us. What a pity. What a shame. Pentecost reminds us to watch for the Spirit, to be aware of its life giving presence; to feel the comfort, the encouragement, the hope and joy that it brings; and to receive the love and the grace and the sheer abundance of blessing that it pours out on our lives. Breath. Listen. Feel. And be aware of the Holy Spirit in your life.

Alleluia. Amen.

