

Pentecost, Year B

May 19, 2024

St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Cleveland Heights, OH

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Acts 2:1-21

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Happy Easter! Yes, this is the last and final day of Easter, also known as Pentecost. On this day, we celebrate the arrival of the Holy Spirit among us to comfort us, to convict us, and to guide us into all truth. I have to admit this feast day, one of the major feasts of the Church, is one of my favorites. It is the feast that ties me directly to my former Christian tradition, the one in which I was raised- the Pentecostal Church. When I first found an Episcopal Church years ago, I was thrilled to find a day we mark called Pentecost. It is on this day, fifty days after the resurrection of Jesus that we celebrate the fulfillment of Jesus's promise that one would come after him, after he ascended into heaven. We celebrated Jesus ascending into heaven on the fortieth day of Easter. But this day is so much more than just a celebration of the arrival of the Holy Spirit. It is a day where, with intention, we mark the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst. It is a day where we discern the Spirit's work in our own lives and in the collective life of this parish. As we do this work of discernment, I think we would do well to look at scripture and see how the Spirit spoke to those who have gone on before us.

In the Old Testament reading, we get this story that is often called the Valley of Dry Bones from the prophet Ezekiel. In this story, we see one of the Spirit's main tasks: to give hope and to bring back to life that which was dead. In the story, God has called upon Ezekiel to speak to the people of Israel. In their despair, in exile, God says

that God's spirit will breath new life into the people. That what was once dead and decayed would again take on flesh and breath and life.

In the book of Acts, we get the actual account of the day of Pentecost. The disciples are gathered, anticipating the arrival of Jesus's promise of the Holy Spirit to them. They no doubt were filled with worry, concern, and even sadness. After all they had lost Jesus twice- once when he was crucified and again when he ascended into heaven. So, they're all there in this room, together, when something incredible happens. A violent wind sweeps through the space, tongues of fire light on each of their heads, they each began to speak in other languages and they are also able to understand other languages. Just think about all of that for a minute. That's a lot! Wind and fire and new speech. What might this experience of the arrival of the Holy Spirit teach us? That that spirit, like wind, blows where she will. Perhaps even that she is sometimes shocking in her work among us. She does things that we could not even imagine or predict. She empowers us to do things we didn't know we were capable of doing. The ancient Celts used the Wild Goose to be a symbol for the Holy Spirit. A goose that is wild and carefree and will stop traffic for five minutes to cross the road if it very well pleases.

And then in the Gospel, we find Jesus telling us more about the Spirit. He says that the Holy Spirit will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgement. The spirit will guide us into the way of love that Jesus taught us about. The Spirit will continue the work Jesus started and will show us a new way of being in the world. The Spirit will show us quite literally how to build the Kingdom of God. The Spirit will dwell within us and empower us to do the work we have been called to do.

To sum up all of those things we learn about the Holy Spirit in scripture, the Holy Spirit revives, challenges, comforts, helps us to discern.

And there's another thing I think the Holy Spirit does in our lives. We find in Acts that the Spirit gave the disciples the ability to speak in other tongues- to speak languages other than their own. I don't know about you, but I don't plan to leave church today being fluent in French or Spanish. But I don't want to write off the Spirit's work in our own lives to enable us to speak a new language or to interpret a new language. Most of you know that I live my life with a stutter. And while it is something I use to try to get rid of or cure, I have come to know it as one of my greatest teachers. It's National Stuttering Awareness week, and this week I have been reflecting on my own stutter. And as a person who speaks differently than most in the world, here is one of the things my stutter, my teacher, has taught me: That God speaks in ways we often don't expect. God comes to us in ways that we expect, yes, but God also comes to us in what is unpredictable. God enables us to perceive and understand God's presence and voice in the world in new ways if we are only willing to open ourselves to the work of the Spirit. And God also enables us to speak words that we don't think we have. The Spirit gives us the ability to proclaim God's love to the world in our own way. God shows up in our imperfections, fills in the blanks, and empowers us to take God's love to a broken and hurting world. No, we might not leave today fluent in a new language, but if we are willing to engage the Spirit, we can leave today speaking and understanding new words. Our hearts can be opened to seeing God in new ways all around us.

A few years back, I came across a video clip of the end of a game show. The stakes were high, and a large sum of a cash prize was at stake. And just before the last round of competition began, the contestant started chanting "Holy Spirit activate! Holy Spirit activate! Holy Spirit activate! Activate! Activate!" This got a chuckle from the crowd and from me. In this moment of pressure, the contestant started praying for the Holy Spirit to activate, to stir up its

power and help her. I don't recall if the contestant ended up winning the prize, but I had no doubt this prayer was fervent.

What would happen if we made this contestant's prayer our prayer? What would happen if we invited the Spirit's power into our lives? To activate? To enable us to see anew God's presence and action? To interpret God's words spoken to us through those we might least expect? What happens if we make ourselves open and available to God's very spirit in our midst?

Come Holy Spirit. From the four winds. Inspire our hearts. Open our lives. Help us see you at work all around us. Amen.