

Sunday Liturgy and Sermon: Coop's Scoops #47 May 31st, 2020



*It's PENTECOST! COME, HOLY SPIRIT,
fill the hearts of your faithful; and kindle in us
the fire of your love.*

Readings for the Feast of Pentecost:

Acts 2: 1-21 Psalm 104: 25-35 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

The Holy Gospel: John 20: 19-23

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. As ^[a] the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart ^[b] shall flow rivers of living water.’” ³⁹ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, ^[c] because Jesus was not yet glorified.

The Collect: Almighty and everliving God, who fulfilled the promises of Easter by sending us your Holy Spirit and opening to every race and nation the way of life eternal, keep us in the unity of your Spirit, that every tongue may tell of your glory; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God now and forever.



The Homily:

“Some of us would be glad to be quiet, but where the Gospel has free course there is sure to be a measure of noise and stir.” ~ Charles Spurgeon, The Pentecostal Wind and Fire

Pentecost is traditionally called the Birth Day of the Church. I think it is actually more like the birthing-day of the Church. Why? What was begun that day? Well, the disciples were able to move beyond their grief and fear and get going on the work that Jesus had called them to do...taking the Good News to the entire world. And Peter, the scaredy cat disciple cowed by a maiden around a fire became the great leader who preached his very first sermon with the result that 3000 people were converted in one day. Talk about church growth! And even more simply, the symbols of Pentecost are also the familiar symbols which we connect with birthday celebrations. Hey, there's gotta be cake, and there's gotta be candles. We light the candles with fire, then after we sing, we blow them out with wind. These two symbols...wind and fire, fire and wind... are the symbols chosen by God to accompany the arrival of His Holy Spirit.

Luke's account does not say that a rushing wind and actual fire raced through the house and landed upon the disciples. That would have resulted in a fallen down upper room and some sadly scorched heads. Luke says the noise heard was LIKE a roaring wind, and what was seen was LIKE fire settling on each one. Luke did the best he could to describe what had never been seen before: the majestic, wild, powerful eruption which the Holy Spirit brings upon people. People, we remember, who are just like us. People who were frightened by danger, confused by waiting, obedient enough to stay together and wait as they were told, and leaning hopefully into the unknown time when Jesus would in fact send the Spirit to them. But Waiting no longer!!! Far from hiding, those same people now tumbled down the stairs and right out into the market square smack

dab in the middle of the city and then found they could not keep their mouths shut! They couldn't stop talking about Jesus and the mighty powerful works of God. They even spoke in languages they didn't even know. Languages given by the Spirit so that every visitor, every business man, every woman walking the kids to Synagogue for school, every soldier, every one every one everyone could hear the Good News in their very own language. Why? So they could decide whether or not to trust in this Jesus –and 3000 of them did just exactly that. 3000 baptisms would have followed. The church, the community, the first congregation of Christians was begun. The birthing day of the Church.

It was not however the birthday of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit was always there from before the foundations of time. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, three in one and one in three. The disciples would have known something about the Holy Spirit...in ancient times, the Spirit fell on particular people for particular reasons, and when those reasons were accomplished the Spirit departed from that person and moved on. Moving like the wind, and like the fire. In Genesis chapter 1 we hear that the Spirit of God moved over the waters, brooding, slow, fast, constantly stirring causing light and life to be born and suns planets and galaxies to span the universe. Later we hear of the wind that the prophet Ezekial calls upon to restore the vast army of dead soldiers, dry bones, to life. Even later, we hear Jesus telling Nicodemus about the wind which blows wherever it chooses, and though we cannot see it, we can see the changes it effects. And we have heard of Jesus breathing upon His disciples...the wind ...the ruhr... of life. We know from our own experiences that wind can be fine and lovely, refreshing us after scorching hot summer days ; it can also be frightening and even dangerous...storms and tornados and shipwrecks show the power of wind. Just so, the Holy Spirit is refreshing and comforting and powerful and uncontrollable and

meant to lead people **to die** to themselves in order to live to Christ. Remember those daily words of Jesus, though, “Do not be afraid”. The Spirit is not SOMEONE to run away from and hide; to duck and cover...the Spirit, as our reading from Corinthians makes clear, is also the giver of great and good gifts for the common good of each and every one of us as we join together to complete the mission of Christ. To do the work. To be transformed so that we can love His way. To become one through forgiveness, mercy, compassion and kindness. That’s the wind.

And now we move to that second symbol. Fire. Again, both dangerous and deadly and comforting and enlightening. The disciples also knew lots from their Jewish faith about fire... Moses and the burning bush, the pillar of fire that led the Israelites in the desert, the fiery furnace that refused to burn up Daniel’s faithful friends. They had heard John the Baptist prophesy that Jesus would baptize people with the Holy Spirit and with fire. Why is fire such a great symbol? I go back to where I started with Charles Spurgeon who says this: “Fire does more than give light—it en-flames—and the flames which sat upon each (at Pentecost) showed them that they were to be ablaze with love, intense with zeal, burning with self-sacrifice and that they were to **go forth among men to speak not with the chill tongue of deliberate logic, but with the burning tongues of passionate love - pleading, persuading and entreating people to come to Christ that they might live!**” **We** are to become inflamed by the Holy Spirit of our God and others are supposed to see **us** blazing. Fire, like wind, can indeed be deadly, but it also can bring great comfort. We watch a burning house and a blazing campfire quite differently! The campfire attracts and warms and welcomes. Any fire attracts. There’s an old joke that has a man and his neighbour standing side by side on a sidewalk. They are watching sadly as the church across the street burns to the

ground. The first man says, “Well, neighbour, this is the first time I’ve ever seen you at church” to which the second man replies, “Well, neighbour, this is the first time I’ve seen the **church on fire.**” I have to ask “Is the church on fire today? Are we blazing with love? What is the wind and the fire of the Spirit doing in and through us today? I long that we become more and more a **church on fire in the right way**...a church that can’t help but attract others...a church that warms and warns and embraces and guides.... Perhaps that will happen in a new way when we, like the disciples on the day of Pentecost **spill out of the building** – buildings - so excited we can’t keep our mouths shut. So Spirit-filled in our words and deeds that we can barely count the converts. Impossible? Who us?

That’s surely what the disciples thought the **day before** Pentecost! May we also find that God moves among us in wind and fire and changes our minds, hearts and tongues just as surely and powerfully as He did theirs! Covid has literally pushed us all out of the building! What might the Holy Spirit make of that!

Amen.

Judie+