

Numbers 11:24-30

Acts 2:1-21

John 7:37-39

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

“Breathe on me breath of God
Fill me with life anew
That I may love what thou dost love
And do what thou wouldst do”

As they say, be careful what you pray for ... you just might get it! Today we celebrate the arrival of the Holy Spirit to those faithful followers of Jesus gathered together in an upper room in Jerusalem trying to figure out what to do next now that the resurrected Jesus has ascended to heaven and is no longer with them. God pours out his Holy Spirit on them just as Jesus had promised and they are never again the same. While we might long for the Holy Spirit to come to us, be advised that doing the tango with the Holy Spirit will turn your life upside down! If you enjoy stability and predictability; if you long for security and the comfort of familiarity; if you strive for peace and calm in your life, you may want to think twice about praying for the Holy Spirit to come to you. The Holy Spirit will have you doing things you never dreamed of doing!

And yet, even if we think twice, the Holy Spirit does come to us ... most often when we are in a bad spot. Perhaps we are feeling burdened by family responsibilities. Maybe we are seeing our future out alone in the world without the security of our family around. Maybe we have a work situation that is just grinding us down to a nub, but we can't leave because we need the income and there's nothing else in sight. It could be that we are facing a rift in a marriage that seems to be beyond repair. Perhaps a best friend has moved away and we are devastated by the loneliness that's left behind for us to endure. Maybe we are facing an illness that is terrifying or someone we love has been diagnosed with an incurable disease. It could be anything. The possibilities for devastation are endless. And yet, if we allow it, the Holy Spirit comes to us in just those moments.

Certainly the 120 folks gathered together in the upper room in Jerusalem were at their wits end. They had thrown their lot in with Jesus and having experienced his resurrection from the dead their faith and resolve are stronger than ever, but they have no idea what to do next. Many of us can relate to that.....having a strong resolve and a resilient faith, but no idea what to do next. The disciples and fellow believers are regrouping after the Ascension of Jesus. They

have replaced Judas with Matthias by casting lots and they are praying together for God's guidance about the next steps. They're as confused as they are elated. As bereft without Jesus as they are solid in the belief in him. It's a low moment for them.

And then things begin to happen. A wild and rushing wind comes through that upper room filling every corner of it. And tongues of fire light on the heads of the believers. The Holy Spirit certainly knows how to make an entrance. There's no question that something extraordinary is happening. And then people began to speak in what to them were foreign languages. They were not speaking in their own native tongue and they were not speaking glossolalia which is speaking in tongues that are unrecognizable. They are simply speaking languages that are not their mother tongue. And they are absolutely filled with the Spirit ... so filled in fact that they can't stand still. They can't stay in that room. They burst outside, each in a different language, proclaiming the good news for all to hear.

God's timing, as always, is perfect. The streets are filled with out-of-towners. In Jerusalem at that time are hundreds and hundreds of foreigners. They are faithful Jews who have come to the city to celebrate the Festival of Weeks which is also a celebration of Moses' having received the Ten Commandments from God. This, too, is known as Pentecost in the Jewish faith because it happens 50 days after the Passover. For the followers of Jesus, it is Pentecost because it is 50 days after Easter, the most important celebration in the Christian year.

The faithful followers of Jesus burst into this mix of people speaking multiple different languages and they are proclaiming the Good News to them, not in their own native tongue, but in the languages of the people present to hear them. Jesus has said to his disciples that he wants this message proclaimed to all the world. God didn't wait for them to go out into all the world. God provided all the world to them right outside the door of their upper room. It was entirely possible that the disciples who were speaking languages they had never used before were just as amazed as the people hearing them! In his own native tongue, each person heard the news of Jesus' life and death and resurrection and his salvation of the world.

Hearing something in one's own language is a wonderful thing. It's comforting. It's reassuring. It's blissfully familiar. Having travelled a bit myself and not being well-versed in foreign languages, I know what a relief it can be to hear someone speaking my language. I don't feel quite so disoriented or confused. I don't feel so incompetent. And I'm not quite as afraid as I am when I can't understand what's being said around me, I can't read any of the signs posted to give me information, and I have no idea which train to take to arrive where I want to be. It's scary. But someone speaking my language puts all of that to rest.

All that anxiety and fear has been washed away, not only for the visitors to Jerusalem but also for the disciples who had no clue what they were going to do next. They didn't even have to make a decision. The Spirit filled them up ... and off they went! No hesitation. No second-guessing. No deliberation. No discussion. No planning or preparation. They just went. For many of us, that kind of impulsivity is, in itself, a little bit scary. We tend to bombard ourselves with the 'What if ...?' questions. For those of us who are patient plodders in all that we do, it can be downright terrifying!

But when the Holy Spirit comes it brings with it great change. The Holy Spirit turns everything upside down. The Holy Spirit is full of energy and a strange sort of peace that is more like confidence and resolution than peace. The Holy Spirit meets us where we are and speaks in a language that we can understand. The Spirit speaks the language of God that speaks directly to our souls and to our hearts. There's no need for interpretation. We understand instinctively what's being said to us. Maybe it is the resolution of some of the things in life that are burdening us ... the loneliness, the struggle to forgive, the desire for patience, the anxiety about the unknowns in the future. The Holy Spirit resolves all those things ... and in the process, turns everything on its head. We don't feel lonely anymore. We don't feel vengeful and resentful and wronged any more. We find we have more patience than we ever thought possible. We look at the future with all the questions still there and realize that we aren't worried.

There have been times when I have preached a sermon that was way out of my comfort zone. Perhaps it was a sermon without a manuscript or notes. Maybe it was the way I delivered it. But there was something different ... something inspired ... something beyond me. When I would ask the question, "What in the world got into me?" Invariably, someone would say to me, "The Holy Spirit got into you!" Indeed. And when the Holy Spirit shows up, we find ourselves doing things we never dreamed of doing. The Holy Spirit fills us up and turns the world upside down.

The Holy Spirit never invades someone who is not open to it. It does not intrude. But to the heart and soul open and willing to accept it, the Holy Spirit will most certainly come. It will come and it will speak the language of God.

So be careful what you pray for ... you just might get it!

Thanks be to God.

AMEN.