

Scripture:

Numbers 11:24-30

Acts 2:1-21

“An experience of the Holy Spirit.”

Today in our scripture readings we have 2 accounts of experiences of the Holy Spirit.

In our Old Testament reading the Israelites are on their way home ---- leaving Egypt and headed for the Promised Land ---- wandering about in the desert ---- longing for home.

And the people are frustrated ---- full of complaints and impatient with God ---- they want to enter into the Promised Land now --- the land of plenty that they dreamed about for the numerous years they slaved away in Egypt.

And amidst this frustrated --- disappointed --- and whining bunch of Israelites ----- comes the Holy Spirit.

“Then the Lord came down in the cloud and spoke with him ----- and took some of the power of the Spirit that was on him and put it on the seventy elders.” ---- verse 25 from our Old Testament reading today.

And then verse 26 ---- “However two men --- whose names were Eldad and Medad --- had remained in the camp. They were listed among the elders but did not go out to the tent. Yet the Spirit also rested on them...”

So the people are whining and complaining about how rough it is --- and become impatient wanting to arrive at the Promised Land ----- immediately.

And God blesses their leaders with the Holy Spirit.

God takes a situation of frustration and disappointment and quickly turns it around --- breathing new life into it.

An experience of the Holy Spirit.

And then we have our New Testament reading.

The day of Pentecost ---- probably the most well known and most often cited and quoted Biblical passage when it comes to the Holy Spirit.

Jesus has ascended --- returned to God's right hand ----- 10 days previous ---
- we heard about it last Sunday --- the Ascension.

And now today --- the gift Jesus promised --- the Holy Spirit --- arrives.

The disciples are gathered ---- indeed Jews from far and wide have gathered for the Festival of Weeks ---- or Pentecost ----- in Jerusalem.

Verse 5 from the book of Acts today reads --- "Now there were staying in Jerusalem God fearing Jews from every nation under heaven." ----- and a few verses later starting at verse 9 we have a listing of many of the countries represented in Jerusalem for the festival that particular year --- Parthians --- Medes --- Elamites --- residents of Mesopotamia --- Judea --- Cappadocia --- and so on.

And then we have a spectacular experience of the Holy Spirit --- so spectacular that those present have difficulty describing it.

Verse 2 says it was --- "a sound like the blowing of a violent wind" --- and verse 3 describes it as ---- "what seemed to be tongues of fire". ---- it sounded like --- and --- it seemed to be.

And Peter and the others disciples are blessed in a special way ---- speaking in such a way that foreigners --- people who speak a completely different language --- understand them.

They spoke the language --- of all who gathered --- ensuring understanding and clarity --- thanks to the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit came and very quickly changed the feel of the room ---- breathing new life there.

Where once there may have been a little confusion and uncertainty ---- "What are we to do without Jesus here with us anymore?" ---- "When is the Spirit that He promised going to come anyway?" ----- and ---- "How are all these people who speak different languages than us ever going to understand us?" ----- quickly turns to clarity and as we soon see new life.

New life as 3,000 people accept Christ ---- verse 41 of Acts 2 reads -----
 “Those who accepted his message” --- Peter’s message about Jesus -----
 “were baptized, and about 3,000 were added to their numbers that day.”

And so very often that’s precisely how the Spirit works.

It changes things --- it changes how we see things --- how we remember things --- how we experience things --- how we interact with what we have experienced and so on --- it comes and breathes new life into things.

The book of Acts --- thousands gathered in Jerusalem for the festival of weeks --- Pentecost --- and Peter the other disciples ---- speak in the language of those gathered and many of them not only hear the words in their native tongue ----- but their hearts are opened up to new possibilities and new life.

And so ----- Acts 2 --- like Numbers 11 ----- an experience of the Holy Spirit.

And now another experience of the Holy Spirit.

This past week ----- Wednesday to be precise -----an old friend of mine ---- someone I hadn’t seen in 28 years --- and only recently spoke to through Facebook and then briefly on the phone ----- came to our home --- we had been connecting by phone for a few days trying to line up a time to get together as he was traveling through Ontario on business.

And as he said to me on the phone a few days before --- “Jonathan I knew who you used to be ----- I don’t know who you are now ---- but I’m interested to find out.”

And so Wednesday we finally got together face to face in real time.

And after so many laughs that my stomach hurt ----- I mean we had some serious laughs.

The kind where you laugh so hard that your stomach hurts ---- I think I would have had a head ache if we had of laughed any longer ----- but after many many laughs ----- we were blessed with an experience of the Holy Spirit.

2 old friends re-connecting once again --- turned out to be a profound blessing for me --- and hopefully him too ---- that I'll know when we re-connect again soon.

My friend lived right around the corner --- right next to the church we both attended and my dad was the minister at ---- and we spent our high school years together laughing about school --- attending church and hanging around together living out our teen age years of exploring ---- questioning and experimentation.

And the truth is what I looked upon as 5 years of absolute joy ---- play time as I described it to him --- high school for me in Montreal at that time was one big 5 year field trip of fun --- sunshine and butterflies ----- but for him it was more like 5 years of darkness and pain.

And I was aware of this to a certain degree --- but I didn't know the extent of it until last week.

We went to school together --- to church together --- to Boys Brigade together --- to summer camp together --- we lived around the corner from each other --- saw each other every day and shared many experiences together --- some good some not so good.

But what for me were 5 years of fun --- were 5 years of mostly pain for him.

I was on every sports team that counted in high school ---- and he was the kid people walked down the hallway and often punched.

We were treated very differently at school and our home lives were radically different as well.

And last Wednesday we laughed and almost cried ----- last Wednesday the Holy Spirit came and stood among us.

And here's how.

After sharing with me many details about some of what happened to him ---- -- he concluded by saying that through all the stuff that happened and had been done to him --- he still somehow knew that God loved him.

He very easily could have chosen to be defined by the challenges and circumstances and quite frankly the abuse that he suffered ---- but instead he chose to see beyond all of that ----- and celebrate God's love for him.

Instead of a life story that could have been defined in terms of darkness --- victimization and so on ----- it was a story more than anything else about God's profound love --- a story of true and tested faith.

An experience of the Holy Spirit --- both to hear his story and also to think about how the Spirit works in general --- standing among us that night for instance.

In his life ----- similar to both of our scripture readings this morning --- God took questionable and challenging circumstances and breathed new life into them through the Holy Spirit --- making of them something new.

In the book of Acts today Peter quotes the prophet Joel ---- saying to the people --- beginning in verse 17 -----

“In the last days, God says,
I will pour out my Spirit on all people.

Your sons and daughters will prophesy,
your young men will see visions,
your old men will dream dreams.

Even on my servants, both men and women,
I will pour out my Spirit in those days,
and they will prophesy.

I will show wonders in the heavens above
and signs on the earth below,
blood and fire and billows of smoke.

The sun will be turned to darkness
and the moon to blood
before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord.

And everyone who calls

on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Powerful words ---- Pentecost words.

But if we look up the original context of these words ----- they come from very dark and challenging circumstances --- and not the jubilant joy and celebration that they are often associated with --- the day of Pentecost --- the coming of the Spirit in Jerusalem after Jesus had ascended.

In truth these words from Joel 2 verses 28-32 ----- are a forecast of destruction and death.

But on Peter’s tongue with the blessing of the Holy Spirit these words are turned into words of great inspiration and wonder and beauty.

Indeed what were once considered a prelude to disaster --- have been transformed in Christ and through the Holy Spirit into nothing less than saving words for about 3,000 people that gathered in Jerusalem that day.

Pentecost --- the arrival of the Holy Spirit for all ----- is all about new life.

New life through the Spirit of God is the real meaning of Pentecost.

And just as the people gathered in Jerusalem experience new life through what was once a dreadful prophecy --- Joel 2:28-32 ---- so it is every time the Holy Spirit of God blesses us.

What I heard in my friend sharing some of the joys and challenges of his life ---- was new life ---- a new perspective thanks be to God.

Circumstances that could have been a prelude for disaster ---- instead --- thanks to God’s love ---- were turned into an opportunity for new life.

An experience of the Holy Spirit.

An experience of the Holy Spirit can come in many different ways --- there is no one way that the Spirit comes -----

----- speaking in languages that up until that day you have never spoken before -----

---- or the sound of a still small voice

--- or through the recounting of tragic events in one life
 ---- or stories of great joy --- or great suffering
 ---- and any other way God so chooses.

The Holy Spirit can come --- manifest itself in numerous ways ---- ways beyond our comprehension and imagination even.

But in the end one thing is always the same.

When it comes to the Spirit of God one thing is always the same --- it is all about new life.

Resurrection life.

Something beautiful rising up out of disaster and suffering ---- just as Christ rose up out of the suffering and betrayal of crucifixion death.

The Holy Spirit of God invades human life in ways that shatter our expectations.

The Holy Spirit is all about new life ----- post resurrection --- He is Risen --- -- anything is possible --- new life.

The Holy Spirit is all about sudden ----- unmerited ----- irresistible new and everlasting life thanks to the grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

As verse 21 from the book of Acts today so clearly says ---- “And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

The Holy Spirit comes in many different ways --- in pain and suffering --- in joy and jubilation ----- in darkness and in light.

But one thing is for certain --- when the Holy Spirit comes ----- things change.

Things take on new meaning and there is new life.

Whenever the Holy Spirit of God decides to come and stick around a while - ---- you can bank on the fact that things will have changed for the better and that there we will be clarity where there was once uncertainty and confusion.

So ----- an experience of the Holy Spirit.

When --- who knows.

Where --- who knows.

How ----- who knows.

Why exactly --- only God knows.

But one thing is for certain --- regardless of the when --- and the where -----
and the how ----- and the why.

When God so chooses to bless us with an experience of the Holy Spirit -----
there will be new life.

Sudden --- unmerited ----- irresistible ---- and beautiful new life.

The Holy Spirit is for everyone.

We're all special in God's eyes.

We're all worthy in God's eyes.

That's precisely why just before Jesus left ----- He promised the Holy Spirit
for all --- just as He was for all.

God is good.

And His Spirit is good.

God is for all ---- and His Spirit is for all.

If ever we are down --- or discouraged --- or losing faith.

The simple Biblical message is hang in there --- God hasn't abandoned you -
----- He isn't finished yet ---- He who began a great work in you will see it
through to completion ----- the Spirit is on the way.

The people were discouraged and frustrated ----- in Numbers today.

The disciples ---- presented with a great opportunity to witness to Christ ---- are a little bit unsure about what to do.

And along comes the Holy Spirit of God --- bringing new life ----- resurrection life ----- the love of God in the person of Christ and influence of the Holy Spirit.

An experience of the Holy Spirit --- who knows when --- who knows how -- ---- and who knows why ----- only God.

An experience of the Holy Spirit ----- life changing --- life giving ---- and always at just the right time --- when we need it most.

The Holy Spirit.

Sudden ----- unmerited --- irresistible ----- new life.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.