

May 20th, 2018 Pentecost Sunday

Scripture:

Ezekiel 37: 1-14

John 20: 19-23

Acts 2: 1-21

“The movement of the Spirit.”

The day of Pentecost ---- the festival of Pentecost is hugely significant for Jews and for Christians ---- and even though we understand it differently --- and it means something different to us ----- it stands as one of the high and Holy days of our faith --- one of the high and Holy days of our year.

As Christians we celebrate Pentecost as a --- or more often as **THE** --- coming of the Holy Spirit.

Despite the fact that there are countless other examples of the coming of the Spirit --- see our other 2 readings fro the day --- despite the countless other examples of a coming of the Spirit ---- Pentecost for Christians is the day all about the coming of the Spirit.

That’s really what Pentecost means for Christians ----- the Holy Spirit ---- the coming of the Holy Spirit.

For Jews Pentecost or --- Shavuot ---- the festival of weeks --- was 2 things - --- neither of which is the Holy Spirit.

For Jews Pentecost is first a celebration of the harvest ---- specifically the wheat harvest ---- in this sense it is very similar to our Thanksgiving ----- a giving of thanks for the bounty of the harvest --- this is the first thing Jews celebrate and mark at Pentecost.

And the other is the Torah.

Pentecost is the commemoration of the anniversary of the day God gave Moses the Torah at Sinai.

Thanksgiving for the Word of God --- and thanksgiving for the harvest --- at God’s hands ---- that’s Pentecost for Jews.

And this is significant because although we as Christians celebrate it for completely different reasons --- the coming of the Holy Spirit --- the reality of it also being a celebration of the Word of God --- the giving of the Torah is huge.

Indeed I think that we as Christians need to rethink Pentecost.

Too often ---- and I've certainly done this myself ---- too often we focus on the Holy Spirit --- without also recognizing what it was that the spirit actually did.

The Spirit never just comes because ----- it doesn't just come and get us all worked up without also purpose.

What happens right after the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost in Acts 2 today?

Anybody remember that part of Pentecost --- what the Spirit does?

It really begins at verse 14.

It comes it stirs people up --- it's something like the blowing of a violent wind --- and people saw what seemed to be tongues of fire ---- lots of people start speaking --- declaring the wonders of God as verse 11 says ---- and then there is verse 14.

“Then Peter stood up with the Eleven ---- raised his voice and addressed the crowd...”

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Peter addresses the crowd ---- there is proclamation --- there is preaching --- God's Word.

What we are involved in together right here and right now is what happened at Pentecost ---- Peter stood up and addressed the people --- Peter preached.

For Jews Pentecost is a gathering --- a feast --- a festival --- all about -----

1. the gift of the harvest
and then

2. the gift of God's Word.

And curiously enough these are the exact same 2 things that the Holy Spirit enables at Pentecost --- the Christian --- harvest ----- and Word of God.

Just as Jesus had promised the Spirit comes and blesses His followers with power.

In Acts 1 verse 8 Jesus says --- "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you --- and you will be my witnesses"

That's the first thing that happens ---- just as Jesus said it would --- the Spirit comes and blesses His followers with power.

And then the second thing the Spirit does ----- which Jesus also spoke about in Acts 1 verse 8 ---- is this --- "Then Peter stood up with the Eleven ---- raised his voice and addressed the crowd..."

Then Peter preached --- then Peter --- just as Jesus said in Acts 1 verse 8 --- then Peter ----- with the power of the Spirit --- witnessed --- preached --- proclaimed --- shared the Word of God.

Jews gathered to commemorate the anniversary of the gift of the Torah --- God's Word --- and the disciples blessed with the power of the Spirit of God --- are also blessed with the Word of God ---- Peter preached.

The Spirit comes ---- and with it comes the Word.

"Then Peter stood up with the Eleven ---- raised his voice and addressed the crowd..."

The movement of the Spirit at Pentecost --- is accompanied by the Word.

The Jewish festival of Pentecost was the celebration of the arrival of the Word of God --- the Torah at Sinai --- and it was the celebration of the harvest.

Clearly the Word was central at Christian Pentecost as well --- people speaking clearly in the languages of others ---- and then Peter standing up and addressing the crowd --- preaching the Good News of Jesus Christ -----

but what about harvest --- is there any celebration of harvest --- at this first Christian Pentecost?

And the answer ---- if we look closely is yes.

And the answer is yes.

Only it was a different kind of harvest --- not the wheat fields but the human heart.

In verse 41 ---- just past where our passage cuts off today ---- just beyond our reading but still in Acts chapter 2 we see the harvest part --- the harvesting of the human heart.

Verse 41 reads ---- “Those who accepted his message were baptized ---- and about three thousand were added to their numbers that day.”

“Those who accepted his message were baptized ---- and about three thousand were added to their numbers that day.”

Those who heard the new Word of God ---- the Good News of Jesus Christ that Peter preached --- were baptized --- became followers of the way --- became Christians --- and there were 3,000 of them.

Harvest.

Just as Jesus took fishermen and made them fishers of men.

So He made a harvest of men.

Just as Jesus enabled fishermen to have a different kind of catch ---- so he enabled a different kind of harvest at the festival of the wheat harvest --- Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit ----- at Pentecost in the first century --- took a harvest to the tune of 3,000 souls in a single day.

3,000 people became Christians that day.

“Those who accepted his message were baptized ---- and about three thousand were added to their numbers that day.”

This highlights exactly what Pentecost means for us today.

Pentecost today means ---- the pouring out of God’s Spirit such that it takes our proclamation --- our words --- our witness ---- and uses it to build the kingdom of God.

And maybe just maybe it’ll be to the tune of 3,000 people in one day.

And maybe just maybe --- it will be to the tune of one person today --- or tomorrow --- or when ever and however the spirit so decides--- we don’t know and we don’t need to know.

And all of this ---- just as Jesus promised.

“And you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you --- and you will be my witnesses ...”

When we bear witness to the Word of God ----- in the power of the Spirit --- hearts are changed.

When we bear witness to the Word of God ----- in the power of the Spirit --- hearts are changed --- there is harvest.

That’s the message of Pentecost.

But we have to be on fire for God ---- and we have to be on fire for His word --- we have to be passionate and we have to be zealous.

We never use that word anymore but I love it ---- zealous.

To be zealous means to have zeal --- and zeal --- is dedication ---- and enthusiasm --- devotion.

God blessed the disciples with zeal on the day of Pentecost.

Thousands of Jews had already gathered.

And not only this but thousands of Jews had already gathered ready to give thanks --- give thanks for God's Word and give thanks for the wheat harvest.

So God seized the moment and sent the Spirit and employed Peter and the Eleven to stand up ---- and to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

“Then Peter stood up with the Eleven ---- raised his voice and addressed the crowd...”

God never just sends the Spirit without also a purpose --- a ministry ---- a purpose.

The Spirit of God is never just a warm fuzzy feel good moment only --- there is always a purpose --- a ministry --- a reason for the Spirit.

Peter stood up --- Peter preached and 3,000 people responded --- were baptized --- were added to their number that day.

In John 20 it's something else ----- when the spirit comes in John 20 --- it's to commission the disciples --- pre Pentecost --- and it's for the forgiveness of sins.

It's commissioning the disciples to go and preach forgiveness --- go and live out forgiveness.

In John 20 --- verse 21 --- we heard it read earlier ----- “Jesus said --- “Peace be with you! As the father has sent me so I am sending you.

And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins --- their sins are forgiven --- if you do not forgive them --- they are not forgiven.”

Purpose --- as I was sent by the Father --- so I am sending you --- forgive sins.

And then there is the passage from Ezekiel --- similar to Acts 2 the Holy Spirit --- ruah ---- comes in a very dramatic and powerful way.

The Jews are in captivity --- scattered and dead --- or as we soon see ---- almost dead.

Before the prophet stands a valley of carcasses --- dead decayed bodies ---- dry bones.

“But the hand of the Lord was on me --- and he brought me out by the Spirit...” ----- so Ezekiel 37 begins.

And the prophet is led back and forth among the dry bones --- and then the Lord says --- speak to them --- and not only speak to them but speak my Word to them.

Listen to verse 4 ---- “then the Lord said to me, Prophecy to these bones and say to them, ‘Dry bones --- hear the word of the Lord.’”

Kind of sounds like Acts chapter 2 doesn’t it --- the Spirit comes --- enters into a servant --- Ezekiel here --- Peter in Acts ---- and then the Spirit gives the servant the Word of the Lord.

And then there’s more --- the servant speaks --- the prophet speaks --- Ezekiel speaks and the bones start a movin’.

Something starts to happen.

“And as I was prophesizing --- there was a noise ----- a rattling sound --- and the bones came together --- bone to bone.
I looked --- and tendons --- and flesh appeared on them --- and skin covered them --- but there was no breath in them.”

“Then he said to me” ---- and here we are kind of like John’s gospel with the breathing of air --- “but then he said to me --- “Prophecy to the breath --- prophesy son of man --- and say to it. --- “This is what the Sovereign Lord says --- Come --- breath --- from the four winds and breathe into these slain --- that they may live.”

“So I prophesied as he commanded me ---- and breath entered them --- they came to life and stood up on their feet --- a vast army.”

Holy Spirit ----- Proclamation --- proclamation and harvest.

Breath entered into them --- they came to life and stood up --- a vast army.

God ----- the Holy Spirit ---- doesn't just come to us without also giving us something to do.

When we are blessed by the Spirit of God we come alive like never before and we are ready to walk --- and work --- and witness --- and proclaim --- in His name.

And clearly sometimes we have to be just about dead --- beat down ---- empty ----- as Jesus was --- as Paul said in Philippians He made himself nothing --- He emptied Himself.

Sometimes --- we have to be like the valley of bones ---- empty of ourselves ---- be made nothing --- half dead ----- before God can come and make us alive and useful again.

Jesus was most alive --- Jesus was most "useful" ---- when? --- after His death ---- in His resurrection.

The Jews come out of captivity --- only after they have been beat down ---- only after first having been a valley of dry bones.

Jesus had to be beat down before these 3,000 people in Jerusalem at Pentecost would be receptive to the Good News that He was and is.

We are a stubborn lot --- us humans.

We are pretty set in our ways --- it often takes a very dramatic shift of circumstances before we are open to something new and different.

Pentecost --- first century --- post resurrection Pentecost was a dramatic shift of circumstances --- as if the resurrection itself wasn't enough.

Clearly it wasn't.

So what does Pentecost means for us today?

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It means God's Spirit poured out will take our proclamation of God's Word -
 -- our witness whatever that may look like ----- and use it to build the
 kingdom of God.

Pentecost means God will bless us with His spirit such that whatever it is
 that we are doing in His name will matter --- be effective --- resonate -----
 take hold ---- somewhere --- somehow.

It may not be 3,000 in a day ---- but somehow --- with the blessing of the
 spirit --- somehow things change.

The Holy Spirit doesn't just come to give us a little high --- or an emotional
 lift ---- it's not just a feeling --- "I felt good it must have been the Holy
 Spirit" --- NO.

The Spirit comes and takes whatever it is that we are doing and animates it --
 -- and blesses it ---- and makes it a divine activity.

William Blake --- 18th Century Romantic poet and painter wrote -----

Unless the eye catch fire,
 The God will not be seen.
 Unless the ear catch fire
 The God will not be heard.
 Unless the tongue catch fire
 The God will not be named.
 Unless the heart catch fire,
 The God will not be loved.
 Unless the mind catch fire,
 The God will not be known.

Until we are on fire for God ---- He will not be
 --- seen
 --- heard
 --- named
 --- loved
 ---- or known ---- because of us.

The movement of the Spirit makes God known.

The movement of the Spirit isn't about us or how we feel --- self expression.

The movement of the Spirit is all about God.

When the Holy Spirit comes and sticks around a while --- something happens ---- proclamation --- a Word ----- new Life --- brokenness healed --- forgiveness --- something happens --- things are not left the same – there is movement.

The Holy Spirit is always accompanied by some kind of change of heart --- change of circumstance -- loss of fear --- dissipation of anxiety --- forgiveness ----- there is a movement of sorts --- a change of sorts --- a transformation ----- something beautiful and life giving --- something divine ---- something of God happens.

The Holy Spirit is --- according to Acts 2 today ---- like wind or fire.

And --- by their very nature ---- wind and fire ---- are all about movement.

And remember in Acts it isn't that the Holy Spirit is wind and fire --- a closer look reveals that what happened was like the blowing of a violent wind ---- verse 2 --- and what seemed to be tongues of fire.

“Like ----- and what seemed to be” ----- the Holy Spirit is a movement beyond description --- the Holy Spirit is a movement without parallel.

The Spirit of God may come suddenly like the rush of the wind.

It may come quietly like the voice of an old friend.

It may come dramatically --- the rattling of bones --- climbing back together --- once dead.

It may come peacefully --- the touch of a hand.

We don't ever really know just how and when and why God will decide to act and send His Spirit.

But we do know that when he does --- things change.

And we also know that when He does it is a beautiful and life giving thing --
- without parallel.

It's amazing rally --- how God can take something all bent out of shape ---
and make something beautiful --- and true and right out of it once again.

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you ... “Jesus
said.

The movement of the Spirit of God is alive ---- it is all around us --- within
us.

It's here again at St. Andrew's --- thank you God.

And it's a beautiful thing.

Where it will take us ---- where He will take us --- what He has in store ---
who knows --- He knows.

We simply have to give ourselves over to it.

God's got this.

God's got this thing we call life --- our life --- my life --- your life --- all of
our lives.

God's got this thing we call St. Andrew's in Whitby --- and so much more.

In Isaiah 40 --- our call to worship we heard about the eagle --- soaring.

Psalms 91 is another great example of eagle's wings.

Eagle's ----- don't flap their wings --- but jump off a cliff into the current of
wind.

So it ought to be with us --- we wait for the movement of the Spirit and then
give ourselves over to it and soar in the power of God.

Amen.