

Now That's The Spirit!

[Text -Acts 2:1-21]

Pastor Dave Shackle
May 24, 2015

A Pastor who normally spends a lot of time each week reading and reflecting, writing and rehearsing to carefully craft a sermon, decides that some Sunday he's going to follow the lead of some of his Pentecostal friends. He's simply going to let the Holy Spirit inspire his message in the moment he delivers it. And what better occasion to try such an adventurous undertaking, than Pentecost Sunday? So that entire week, the pastor refrains from doing any of his normal preparation work. Then, on Sunday morning, right before he gets-up to preach, he prays, "Holy Spirit of Wisdom, reveal your word to me for this moment." And clear as day, the message comes to him: "Dave, you have been *really* lazy this week!"

Proclaiming the *Gospel* - the Good News that is revealed in and through Jesus Christ - is always a challenging task. It involves doing the preparatory work that any effective communication requires; while at the same time, being open to an Inspiring, Transcendent Spirit. And when it comes to presenting a message *about* this Transcendent Spirit, the process becomes even more complex. Perhaps that's why the author of Acts uses similes and metaphorical imagery to try to portray the Holy Spirit's presence and power: "Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared to them, and a tongue rested on each of them...."

Wind and Fire. Since the dawn of human history, these two elements have represented the Divine, Transcendent Spirit. In the Book of Genesis, the story is told of how the Holy One forms the first human being from the dust of the earth. But that being has no life - it is simply an empty shell. But then, the Creator of the Cosmos, the Divine Source of All, bends-down and breathes into that being the Breath of Life. And that human becomes a living, thinking, feeling, self-aware soul - filled with Divine Breath and Spirit! In the Hebrew language, the

same word is used for wind, and breath, and spirit,: the word *RU-AH*. *RU-AH*, the essential Breath of Life. We've all heard stories about people who have stopped breathing, and would likely die if someone didn't give them mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. That mirrors the Divine action described in Genesis - as the Holy *RU-AH* animates and enlivens humankind.

On Pentecost, the sound of that Divine *RU-AH* fills "the entire house" where the believers are sitting, and pours-out into the streets! The story of Pentecost, and the history of the Church which is born that day, is the story of how the Holy Spirit continues to fill and enliven, inspire and empower "the *entire* house!" That Divine Wind and Breath and Spirit is intended for *all* people - not just twelve disciples, not just long-winded preachers, but *every* child of God! And just as we all need to take that first breath to begin our lives, we also all need that inspiration of the Holy Spirit - to enliven us, and to empower us to share our lives, and our faith, with others.

At the end of the Pentecost story, when Peter finishes his preaching, we read that "those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand people were added to their number." Now that's pretty significant church-growth! And what's also significant, is that if 3,000 people are baptized that day, we can be fairly certain that this number includes men and women, young and old, saints and sinners - all kinds of people. And if 3,000 are baptized, it's highly unlikely that Peter alone did the baptizing. This tells us that the blessings of the Spirit are intended for *all* people, and that ministry of the Church needs to be carried-out by *all* of its members. Which brings us to that second symbol of the Spirit - *Fire!*

Those believers saw "tongues as of fire, which came and rested on each of them. And *all* of them were filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." That would have been a mind-boggling experience - so many different people, speaking so many different languages. Yet the purpose of that experience is really quite simple. The intention of the Holy Spirit on *that* Pentecost, is to make sure that **everyone** is included; that no one

miss-out on the Good News because of linguistic, or cultural, or social differences. I believe that the Holy Spirit desires the same thing on *this* Pentecost:

That no one be excluded;

That we remember that we are all members of One Family;

And that this Family puts-forth a special effort to reach-out to those who are often pushed-aside because of their social status, their gender identity, their perceived differences, or their religious differences!

The Fire of Pentecost, is the Flame of Divine Love - a Love which will warm our hearts and melt-away any barriers that would separate us. Because when that Fire of Divine Love burns within us, we begin to warm-up to the Truth: that “different” doesn’t mean “deficient” or “defective”; that “diversity” truly is a Divine blessing! Those tongues of fire inspire those early believers to proclaim God’s welcoming grace in a way that can be understood by all the people around them. I think, that this is the Holy Spirit’s way of demonstrating that the language of Divine Love is truly Universal!

Today on this Pentecost Sunday, let us pray that the Holy Spirit will increase our ability - and inspire our desire - to speak to one another in ways that are compassionate, inclusive, and warmly welcoming. After all, this *is* the mission to which we have dedicated ourselves, as the Brecksville United Church of Christ: “To Love, Serve, and Accept All People with God’s Life-Changing Power!” That “Power” is the power of the Holy Spirit - the same Spirit who calls us to this mission, and who inspires us to carry it forward - even in those weeks when we may be a bit lazy!