

As Tongues of Fire

“When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” (Acts of the Apostles)

This coming Sunday we celebrate Pentecost; the birth of the Church. We remember that just fifty days after the humiliation and fear that the disciples experienced at Jesus’ crucifixion, here they are at the very center of God’s unleashing of the wild power of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost was a wild rush of God’s presence flooding out over the world in a new and mighty way. These fragile, fragmented souls are the first of all of us to experience the Holy Spirit in this new way. Jesus had promised his followers that he would send an Advocate, the Holy Spirit, but that promise is realized in a way that I am sure far surpassed anything the disciples might have expected. This was not business as usual---this was new life---- new life for the followers of Jesus and new life for a world that hungered for freedom from all that separated them from God.

New life and new understanding through the Spirit of God---that is what is given to us at Pentecost—an outpouring of God’s energy that has the power to touch every life and no one is excluded.^[1]

And any gift freely given can be freely rejected. God’s love does not coerce, it does not demand...it only invites. God has always been at work in the world inviting humankind into greater love, greater mercy and greater justice.

But now, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we too are given the power to be God’s agents of this transformation. We are now both the invited as well as those who extend the invitation. It is the Holy Spirit working within the hearts and minds of those first followers and all who came after that sets us free from living out of their fear once and for all.

Initially, we remember that they had gathered out of fear, shame and dismay, and then they began to gather out some vague hope, but now they boldly burst out into the streets and tell the world about Jesus. What an amazing turn around.

Sometimes when things in our world or lives become chaotic we forget to trust in the power of the Holy Spirit to guide and guard us through difficult times. We are so hard at work trying to hang on to what we fear we are losing or trying to gain control when control isn’t possible that we are in danger of becoming a generation of functional atheist; people who *say* that we trust in God’s power but very often *act* out of fear and anxiety.

But our history tells us that the Holy Spirit working in us can do more than we can ever ask or imagine.

On Pentecost we have an opportunity to remember that we are children of God empowered by the Holy Spirit. We are not a people who need to be frightened by any ill wind that blows.

We need not fear that “all is lost,” we need only to trust that the Holy Spirit is inviting us into a new thing. Now, I do not know what this new thing is, but I trust that God does. God has been at work transforming the faith in every generation.

^[1] Beverly Gaventa, *Texts for Preaching*.

I believe that the Holy Spirit has the power to touch the hearts and minds of a whole new generation and continue God's work of healing a hurting world.

We need only to put away our fear and hear the rush of the mighty wind and feel the heat of the tongues of fire as they call us into new birth and new beginnings for as Paul reminds us, fear is not our inheritance as children of God.

This is no Pollyanna hope, this is belief in the Holy Spirit who gives us courage and strength to stand in the middle of the chaos and violence of a world in turmoil and speak of hope and reconciliation.

Come and join us this Sunday as we celebrate Pentecost and renew our Baptismal Covenant. I will say the Thanksgiving over the waters of Baptism, we will get wet as we rejoice that new life comes out of death and I will offer the chrism to all who want it to trace a cross on your foreheads to remind you that you are all marked as Christ's own forever.

We are the Body of Christ. Pentecost reminds us that we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to make the kingdom come on earth as in heaven—every day. Pentecost is a special day in the life and the Church so we will do it right! And don't forget to wear red, the color of the Holy Spirit!

Grace and Peace, Stephanie+