

Pentecost A, June 12, 2011

John 20:19-31; Acts 2:1-21; Ps. 104:25-35,37; 1Corinthians 12:13b-13

Today's stories about the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, are pretty dramatic and exciting, don't you think?

A terribly loud wind

Fire on their heads

Staggeringly overcome

Telling all sorts of people – including the church school and those in assisted living – that they are full of God's hopes and dreams

Bearers of forgiveness

New skills in language and proclamation

Giving up private ownership for the common good

The Spirit was made manifest in a way that those who were mourning the loss of Jesus, those who had shut themselves away in fear, were now turned inside out, catapulted into the world stage with power, with God's own self abiding in all of them. Catherine of Siena (14<sup>th</sup> c.) says it this way: "there the soul dwells like the fish in the sea and the sea in the fish."

How do you feel about calling such a wild presence "The Comforter"? How do you describe the Pentecostalists who value and cultivate the presence of the Spirit in their worship? Have we settled for less than a full experience of God because we are afraid of the heat, the fire, the passion for God?

Last week I suggested that perhaps people don't want to die because they haven't really lived their lives fully – following their dreams, telling the truth, nurturing the relationships that matter with time and energy. This portrait of the church and our poor imitation of it suggests that we have experienced a tame God: we're hoarding our stuff, our security, and we might even be afraid that 'the powers that be' might not welcome a people full of purpose for God. Actually, as one of those in power, it would be thrilling to witness a mighty stirring. There have been times in church history when 'great awakenings' happened. What if someone expected as much of each one of us?

In her book Traveling Mercies Anne Lamott echoes most of us:

"As we sat on the runway the man with the book about the apocalypse commented on the small gold cross I wear. 'Are you born again?' he asked as we taxied down the runway. He was rather prim and tense...I did not know how to answer for a moment. "Yes," I said, "I am."

Now my friends like to tell each other that I am not really a born again Christian. They think more along the lines of a comic who says in his routine: I am not really a Jew; I'm Jew-ish. They think I am Christian-

ish. But I'm not. I'm just a bad Christian. A bad born again. And certainly like the apostle Peter I am capable of denying it, of presenting myself as a sort of leftist, liberation theology enthusiast and maybe a sort of vaguely Jesusy bon vivant. But it's not true. And I believe that when you get on a plane and you are lying you're doomed. So I told the truth. I'm a believer, a convert. I'm probably about three months away from slapping an aluminum fish Jesus on the back of my car although I first want to see if the application or the stickum in any way interferes with my lease agreement."

Being in church and expressing ourselves in good order seems to be in keeping with our lease agreement – few signs, a lot of smooth edges. How would moving in the Spirit affect our lease agreement with God. The disciples were the same way, except that after this day, the scholar Raymond Brown says they became apostles.

A Pentecost church will reach out to people of every language, tribe, nation.

A Pentecost church will call voices, prophecy, hopes and dreams from young and old, male and female.

A Pentecost church will preach and baptize and be concerned about the economics of a common good.

A Pentecost church will be inspired by God's own breath.

A Pentecost church will offer forgiveness in the name of God's love.

Here's how the Spirit played out in one place. (Barbara Lundblad source). "How's your building project going. Oh we ran out of money before we could re-do the worship space. What could be more important than the worship space. We renovated the basement, put in a couple of showers and fixed the kitchen. We have a shelter now for homeless men. On the Sunday before the shelter opened we started the worship service in the usual way and then when it was time for communion people carried the bread and the wine downstairs. The whole congregation gathered around the empty beds. They passed the bread and the cup around the circle. The body of Christ given for you. That night the shelter beds were full, and the worship space needed a lot of work."

I think that the Comforter was comforted. Pentecost didn't disappear even though the liturgical calendar says we only get a day of really really red and really hearing other folks speak in different languages. I'm hoping Pentecost doesn't end today. I am thinking of what will happen at St. Alban's downtown, of what could happen here with a bereavement program that includes cooking for one classes. I am wondering about recipes where all the lovely things in the gardens will go.

Come Holy Spirit as mighty wind or inspired breath. Blow on the ashes and embers of faith and empower us to speak and to act so that no one is in need among us. Amen+

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Sources for stories: diocese of Texas (Lamott) and Day One