

## June 8, 2014 - Pentecost

### Acts 2:1-21

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This story of Pentecost is a great story. It's also one that is really hard to relate to, hard to discern what it might have to do with us. It happened once; it was a long time ago; we weren't there. The events the story tells are fantastic, wonderful, and seemingly way beyond our own personal experience.

The thing is, if you had told this story to the 120 disciples who were gathered together, waiting for they knew not what, praying for they knew not what, those 120 disciples would have reacted to the story the same way we do. Sounds great; doesn't have anything to do with us. Those first followers had no clue what was about to happen to them.

So for me, the first take away from this story is that God's Spirit is not ours to control--or even predict. The community of those 120 hasn't taken matters into its own hands, getting organized and venturing forth with banners unfurled. It hasn't done that because it doesn't know what to do and because it knows it cannot control the Spirit of God upon which it waits. So, those 120 have withdrawn to wait and to pray for they know not what.

We've got a group of folks in church council who are taking a serious look at the Mutual Ministry Review we did last year. They're gathering more info so they can put together a plan of action. They have set out for themselves a large task. And I am really happy they are doing so. We need to do this at Living Water. Periodically we need re-set a plan for doing ministry and then work that plan. This is absolutely true.

It's also true that we cannot control the Spirit of God. It will blow where it wills. Pentecost did not happen because the 120 disciples had an action plan. Pentecost happened because it was God's time and the 120 were praying for they knew not what. So my second take away from this Pentecost story is that a prolonged period of prayer for the ministry of this parish would be a good thing to include in our action plan. Seems to me we do a pretty good job around here of praying for people in need. Those prayers make a difference. Prayers for our ministry together will make a difference, too. Unless things have changed in the last five years, the ELCA's "program" for church renewal is prayer and Bible study.

Where will that lead? Don't know. I can't control or predict the Spirit any better than anyone else. I do know this: Like the burning pillar of fire by night that accompanies the Israelites through the wilderness, on Pentecost the fire-like Spirit resting on the heads (and tongues) of the disciples guides them into God's mission, taking them places they could never imagine and giving them confidence to speak about the God known to them in Jesus Christ.

And that leads to take away number 3. God's Holy Spirit comes bearing gifts. But the gifts are not for the personal enjoyment or edification of those who receive the gifts. The gifts are given for the sake of everyone around those who receive the gifts. This should not be surprising. It's been God's *modus operandi* all along. God's response to the Tower of Babel when languages are

confused people are scattered is to call Abraham and to bless him *so that he can be a blessing to all nations*. What happens on Pentecost is a tiny reversal of Babel as people come together and hear the 120 speaking their own language. Once again there is a blessing, a gift. And who benefits most from the gift? Not the receivers, but those around them.

Take away number 4: God's Spirit is active where we least expect it. Well, that's God's *modus operandi*, too, right? Case in point, how odd of God to choose the Jews. How odd of God to choose to become human and be born in obscure village of peasant parents. How strange, how odd, how illogical that the baby born would be crucified. God's Spirit is active where we least expect it. Luke quotes the prophet Joel on this as saying that God's Spirit will be poured out on *all* flesh, Jewish or not, old or young, owner or slave, male or female. This was not the way Luke's world operated. In too many ways it still isn't,

1. God's Spirit is not ours to control. Get used to it.
2. Our job is not to control, direct, or channel but to pray. We can do that.
3. The gifts the Spirit gives us aren't given to make us feel better. The gifts God gives us are for the sake of others. When we get that and are happy with that, we'll feel a whole lot better.
4. God's Spirit is active where we least expect it. As many North American churches agonize over declining membership and what to do about a millennial generation of "nones," (and I don't mean the ones with habits; I mean "nones" as in no religious affiliation), perhaps we might take a page from this first-century playbook. Where do we see God at work in our midst? What has God been doing in our church, our homes, our work-places, our communities, our everyday lives, and even in places we do not expect? The Spirit of God is active where we least expect it.

The Spirit of God is active. The Spirit of God *is* active.