

SermonsA17Pentecost

Acts 2:1-21

John 20:19-23

Today is the celebration of The Pentecost. It's what we might call a Transition Holiday because it is the day that the early believers in Jesus Christ began to make the transition from being Jewish to being Christian. In fact, Pentecost began and still is a Jewish holiday as well as a Christian holiday. In our reading from the Book of Acts we heard about how flames of fire appeared over the heads of the disciples and how when filled with the Holy Spirit they were suddenly able to speak in languages that they had never studied.

Can you imagine that? Suddenly Spanish speakers speaking English? English speakers speaking Russian? Russian speakers speaking Swahili? Rosetta Stone – the company that sells teach-yourself-a-language courses – they would be out of business for sure if that happened today.

Now, this ability to speak in other languages is also called “speaking in tongues.” Some churches like the Pentecostal Church even insist that you don't have the Holy Spirit if you don't speak in tongues. We're probably on the other end of the spectrum.

Still ... most of us are pretty fascinated by the speaking of tongues and the flicker of flames over the heads of believers ... they get our attention like special effects do in a movie. But, I wonder if the most amazing part of the Pentecost story is not the audio and visual razzle dazzle. I wonder if the most amazing part of the story is that the speaking of tongues and flames overhead were *only the beginning* of the Holy Spirit's work among God's people!

The Holy Spirit provided an impressive and inspiring show. But, even more impressive than that, the Holy Spirit turned the *fearful and bewildered* followers of Jesus into bold evangelists ... people unafraid to speak about the power of the Risen Christ in their lives. The very same people who had been hiding behind locked doors and looking heavenward

with dismayed expressions on their faces ... these very people now had a clear sense of mission and were ready for action.

And, act they did. The chapters that follow our first reading today tell of the signs and wonders they did.

On that first Christian Pentecost day alone 3,000 were baptized. Now, I'm not sure who was doing the baptizing, but I'm pretty sure that whoever they were each and every one of them was breaking out in a full sweat. Three thousand baptisms! That's a lot of work! Just ask the altar guild.

In the days that followed the believers also sold all their possessions and gave the proceeds to the poor. Just thinking about that makes me perspire.

They cleared out their busy calendars so they could spend as much time as possible eating together and worshipping together. It doesn't say so in scripture, but someone must have been in a steaming hot kitchen cooking a whole lot of food. Do you suppose the kitchen crew was also breaking out in a sweat? I know I've seen our kitchen crews needing to wipe their brows over and again.

The leadership also really rolled up their sleeves and got down to work. Since there was no such thing as ordination at that time, you can be sure it wasn't paid clergy doing the heavy lifting.

Things weren't easy for them either. They faced fierce opposition. The *religious landscape* around them wasn't hospitable in any way shape or form. They weren't just looked down on or ridiculed or dismissed. They were threatened and persecuted. Yet they persisted, strong in the belief that they had something nourishing to offer to a world that didn't even know it was hungry.

They prayed too ... a lot. Everyone prayed:

“Grant to your servants, to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your Holy Servant, Jesus.” (Acts 4:29-30)

And, do you know what happened when they prayed? The place where they gathered was all shaken up. Then, even as it was shaking, more Spirit, more power, more boldness came upon them. It was like *gracious* circle instead of a *vicious* circle. More prayer led to more inspiration, more inspiration led to more perspiration, more perspiration led to more prayer.

Back in those earliest days of the church, when the rush of mighty wind had subsided, and when the flames overhead had flickered out, and when people began to converse again in their normal languages ... the newly made church of Christ did not rest on the laurels. There was work to do and they got up and did it. Within a period of just a few decades disciples of Jesus Christ took the message of the Gospel from one end of the known world to the other. Within a hundred years they had marched “off the map” as it says in scripture. A goodly number of them traveled far outside their comfort zones. They hung around with people they never wanted to hang around with before. They traveled to places that were not on their vacation bucket lists. Their passion for sharing God’s love with all of humanity could not be contained.

They *were* inspired and they *did* perspired.

In the Kingdom of God on earth, *inspiration* and *perspiration* have always gone hand in hand. As a reminder of that, on the way out the door after worship, each household here today will receive a bandana.

These bandanas symbolize the hard, sweaty, hands-on work that we share as followers of Christ. Bandanas have been used to wipe the sweat off brows for hundreds and hundreds of years.

These bandanas come to you in a rainbow of colors. The variety of colors symbolizes the many different ways that we are individually gifted for the many and various kinds of work that God calls us to do in the world. Just think of it. These humble bandanas can be used for cleaning, as bandages, as head coverings, as pot holders, or dust masks when camping or working. They can be used around the front of the neck as wind stops or around the forehead as sweat mops. They can go around the back of the neck as sun shields. Your bandages can be used as tourniquets or slings for injuries. And, of course, they can catch tears or the drips from a runny nose. In fact, on the packaging that your bandana comes with today there is a list of over 50 different ways to use a bandana. Some of these uses you may never have thought of before. There are probably a lot of ways that you are gifted to serve that you've never thought about before too.

As we move into our year of visioning and planning, I hope that all of us will find a special place in our homes to put our bandanas ... a place where we will see them often ... where they can remind us to ponder and pray for the Holy Spirit to fall fully upon this congregation.

I invite you now to start praying for a full and overflowing measure of the Holy Spirit with me:

Holy Spirit,

You inspired your people to be made anew on the First Pentecost. Come also more and more to us. Inspire us and make us new.

AMEM

