

Day of Pentecost B 2018  
May 20, 2018 :: All Readings  
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## *“Oh, How the Spirit Moves!”*

Today is the Day of Pentecost. Now, the word “Pentecost” comes from the Greek word that means “50<sup>th</sup> day,” and today is in fact the 50<sup>th</sup> day after Easter. And it’s a *big* feast day in the life of the Church. Some have said it is third in line after Christmas and Easter. But, you know, Pentecost really doesn’t get the same respect as the other two. And I think it’s because Christmas and Easter are about things that happened to someone else, while Pentecost is potentially about something that could be happening in and through us. Let me explain.

Pentecost is a day when we remember a time when the followers of Jesus really allowed the Spirit of God to work in and through their lives. Therefore, the Day of Pentecost has also been a good day to think about how the Spirit of God *could* be at work *in our own* lives. And that can be a bit too close for comfort for some people. But more about that later.

Anyway, I want to look at the way the Spirit was at work in the lives of the original followers of Jesus, by briefly looking at each of our four readings, and from that see what we might

conclude to be what the Spirit needs to be doing in our own lives. And so, I'll begin with our reading from the book of Acts.

While there are a lot of people milling around in our first reading, the only one called out by name is Peter. And so, when the Spirit of God has done his thing, and enabled the followers of Jesus to speak about “God’s deeds of power” in the various languages of the world, things appear to be getting out of hand. And it’s Peter who stands up and addresses that enormous assembly, and quoting from the prophet Joel, persuades everyone that what just took place, was *supposed* to take place. And that what all those people have witnessed, is the Spirit of God at work in the lives of his people.

And that’s a really remarkable thing, when you consider what Peter was doing when we first encountered him in scripture: He was a simple, small-town fisherman, who was likely in possession of a very limited education; that is, he knew about his own profession, but probably not about much else. And what’s more, throughout the time that he was following Jesus, Peter was best known for making brash declarations, for taking unnecessary risks, and, when the chips were down, for denying that he even knew who Jesus was. That’s *not* a very auspicious description.

But now, in our reading from Acts, not only is Peter *not* denying his knowledge of Jesus, but he has become Jesus' first and arguably foremost advocate.

And if the Spirit of God could accomplish *that* is Peter's life, just imaging what the Spirit of God could accomplish in *our* lives.

And then I look at the reading from Romans. It's a letter from Paul, to one of the many Christian congregations that he's helped to establish. But what was Paul doing when we first encountered him in the scriptures? He was persecuting the early followers of Jesus. In fact, he's probably the only person we know about who's official job description seemed to entail the hunting down of the followers of Jesus, wherever they were living, and returning them to Jerusalem, where they would be put on trial for heresy. And if they refused to renounce their affiliation with Jesus, they could very well be put to death.

But one day, Paul has this encounter with the Spirit of God on the road to Damascus, that completely turns his life around. And over the course of a number of days, or weeks, or months – we don't really know – Paul changes from being one of the most ardent persecutors of the followers of Jesus, to arguably becoming

the single most influential person in the life of the church as we know it today.

And if the Spirit of God could accomplish all *that* in Paul's life, just imaging what the Spirit could accomplish in *our* lives.

And then, we look at our reading from John's gospel. In it, Jesus is talking to his disciples. And after Jesus, it's the disciples who're the main characters in that story. But it's hard to know much about their backgrounds; about who they were, and what they were doing, before becoming the disciples of the Rabbi Jesus. Certainly some were fishermen, and one was a tax collector. But as for the rest, we can only speculate.

But my point is this: they would probably not be your first choice for a collection of people tasked with the responsibility of taking the Good News of the Gospel throughout the world. But the Spirit of God was at work in the lives of those men and women as well. And the Spirit of God enabled them all – like Abraham – to abandon the all-too-familiar geography of their homes in Palestine, and venture out, to plant the seeds of the Gospel in the far corners of the unknown world.

And if the Spirit of God could accomplish all that through them, just imagine what it could accomplish in our lives.

Finally, I want to look at our reading from Psalm 104.

I saved it for last, because the story that is hidden within its verses, is very personal for me, and it involves my making something of a confession to you all. So, on to the psalm.

For the most part, Psalm 104 is an extended exultation of the glory and majesty of God. And throughout that psalm, the author is looking at the world all around him, and everything he sees bears witness to that glory and majesty of God. It's a really wonderful psalm, and you can read it for yourselves, on page 735 of the Prayer Book.

But this past week, as I was preparing these remarks, I noticed something odd. Our reading from Psalm 104 extends from verse 25 through to verse 35, it then skips verse 36, and then ends with verse 37. And I wondered why. So I turned in our Prayer Book to that psalm, to see what was going on, and this is what I found.

Now, I'm going to read to you the final three verses of that psalm, and include what was left out:

<sup>35</sup>May these words of mine please him; I will rejoice in the LORD.

<sup>36</sup>Let sinners be consumed out of the earth, and the wicked be no more.

<sup>37</sup>Bless the Lord, O my soul. Hallelujah!

When I saw what verse 36 said, I realized why they left it out. It's the only verse that doesn't pay tribute to God. It's the only verse that doesn't revel in the glory and majesty of God. But it's also an ugly verse. But it's a verse that reflects the very human tendency to be people who are praising God in the one moment, and then to become people who are condemning the "sinners" and the "wicked" in the next. And do you know what? This is a psalm that very much describes me. And that's my confession.

Peggy will verify what I'm about to say: For the most part, I'm a nice guy. I'm a good neighbor. I'm decent to young and old. I'm patient with the people in front of me at the checkout line.

And I will even listen when someone from the Jehovah's Witnesses comes knocking at my door.

But should you cut me off in traffic; or should you do something with your car that I deem to be stupid or unnecessary, it's like a breaker trips within me, and I want to get back at you. I want to punish you.

Now, I'll cut myself some slack: I think I'm better than I used to be. But that's one of the places where I need the Spirit of God to continue working in my life. I need the Spirit of God to enable me to transition from verse 35 to verse 37, without my making that ugly diversion in verse 36. And maybe some of you can identify with what I'm describing. And maybe that's where you need the Spirit of God to be at work in your life, too.

You see, on this Day of Pentecost, when we celebrate the work that God's Spirit accomplishes in the lives of his people, we may hold back on our enthusiasm a bit, because we're afraid that what the Spirit accomplished in the lives of the people described in our readings, he'll also try to accomplish in our lives as well.

And there's the rub: Because maybe we don't want to become evangelists, like St. Peter. And maybe we don't want to become

church planters, like St. Paul. And maybe we don't want to travel the world, planting the seeds of the Gospel in places that are unfamiliar to us, like those original disciples did.

But that's okay. Because maybe the only thing the Spirit of God really wants to accomplish in our lives is to enable us to go from verse 35 to verse 37, without having to be side-tracked by verse 36 – whatever that might look like in our lives.

And I really believe that's the case. Because, sometimes, the best way we can serve God, is by being the best sorts of people possible.

And so, and to that end, let us pray: “Come, Holy Spirit, come. Fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love. Amen.”