

The Rev. Renee L. Fenner
St. Barnabas Episcopal Church
Day of Pentecost-Year C
May 23, 2010
Text: Acts 2:1-21

“Spirit of the Living God, Rain down on US!

*O Holy Spirit, by whose breath, life rises
Vibrant out of death; come to create,
Renew, inspire; come, kindle in our hearts your fire.*

*You are the seeker’s sure resource, of burning
Love, the living source, protector in
The midst of strife, the giver and the Lord of life.*

These words are taken from hymn #502, *Veni Creator Spiritus*. It is most often sung at ordinations, as it was yesterday at the service for the newest deacon of our diocese, Robert Ard, Jr. It is certainly most appropriate, as are other Spirit hymns, for this Day of Pentecost that the Church universal celebrates. With sincere hearts, we collectively ask that God’s Holy Spirit come amongst us to bring God’s fire into our hearts that we might be renewed and inspired.

Often this past week, I found myself trying to imagine what it must have been like to have experienced that day some two thousand years ago.

The writer, Luke, paints a picture for us as Jewish people from many nations converged on Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Weeks, also known the Day of the First Fruits or Pentecost. Imagine the number of buyers and sellers in the marketplaces, streets so packed with worshippers that one could scarcely breathe, let alone walk the narrow streets. Those who have come to share their harvests with the poor may not have had so far to go. Perhaps the Temple was so full that only few were let in at a time. And somewhere in the city, were huddled a band of men, women, and perhaps a few children. This group probably knew to celebrate this high festival but had closed themselves off from the rest of the crowd. They were waiting, waiting as they were told when suddenly a force, unlike any other they could have imagined came upon them. With rushing wind and tongues, as of fire, the disciples experienced the awesome presence of God. The Spirit of God

who first moved upon the face of the waters at the creation of the world now lit up and filled the entire house. And the Holy Spirit descended upon each and everyone. Nothing could have prepared them for that. In an instant their world had been turned upside down. A great transformation had now come over them. Fear vanished. Anxiety was gone. Restlessness was no more. Untrained tongues began to speak and to speak boldly as they set forth out into the streets rejoicing and proclaiming the Good News of God in Christ. ‘What is this? What is this?! I hear you! I understand you!’ People gathered from all over the world were suddenly stopped in amazement for they could all understand what was being said to them. *“Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”*

The Spirit of God did a mighty deed that day as the disciples preached to the people, and in several verses after our lesson for today Luke wrote that 3,000 came to believe and were baptized that day into the Body of Christ. Three thousand people because God met them where they were! How amazing was that that each one heard the gospel in his or her languages! Not ONE language but many languages!

Year after year we hear this story of Pentecost. And we might think that there will never, ever be another event like it. But the truth of the matter is that Pentecost like Resurrection comes again and again, each and every day as the Spirit of God moves and renews and transforms hearts and lives. And the Spirit does not come to us in ONE way but in many ways.

Year after year we hear this story of Pentecost. And we remember how the first disciples, the followers, were baptized in the Spirit, and became the apostles, the leaders, were sent out beyond the shores of Galilee to the ends of the earth to witness to the Good News of God in Christ. This is part of the work of the entire Church to which we belong. We may not be called on to shed blood for our faith as they did but we do witness to the living Christ whenever we forgive others and accept their forgiveness. We witness to the risen Christ when we boldly and unashamedly testify to ‘what we have seen and heard.’ We witness when we share our stories of what God has done in our lives. Someone once said: “We don’t all have to preach from a

pulpit or teach in a classroom. We don't have to stand on the corner with a bullhorn. We can do it by the very examples of our lives in our thoughts, words, and actions."

Year after year we hear this story of Pentecost. And we are reminded of the amazing and creative energy of God who raises up leaders like Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu and who continues to ignite new fire within *new voices and in us* so that we might help change the world for the better.

Year after year we hear this story of Pentecost. And we are challenged to come out of our "upper room mentality" and out of our comfort zones. We need to shake off the notion that one expression of faith is better than another. For it is written, 'in the last days it will be, God declare, that I will pour out my Spirit upon ALL flesh.' What is important is that we worship in Spirit and in Truth.

We have heard this story and we rejoice in the diversity of creeds and cultures in our world knowing that God has uniquely and wonderfully fashioned humankind. And we are called to embrace one another as sisters and brothers, to "love one another as Jesus has loved us."

*We have heard this story and we rejoice in the Spirit of the Living God who dwells among us. It is the work of the Spirit, who makes the Lord a living presence with God's (his) people wherever they are. It is the Spirit who draws us together for worship Sunday after Sunday. It is the Spirit who makes Christ present in the reading of God's Holy Word and in our gifts of bread and wine that ultimately become the precious Body and Blood of Christ, the Bread of Heaven and the Cup of Salvation. It is the Spirit who is present at our baptisms as we are washed in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. It is the Spirit whose power confirms us in Way of Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth and the Life.**

Yes, we have heard the story of Pentecost. And it is NOT just an old, old story for the Story continues now and is yet to be told. Amen!

* paraphrased from *The Apostolic Flame*, a sermon by Fleming Rutledge