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St. Barnabas' Episcopal Church
Day of Pentecost/Year B
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Text: Acts 2:1-21

Pentecost

Today the Church celebrates the Feast of Pentecost, exactly fifty days after the resurrection. It is the day when, as we heard in the second lesson, the promised Spirit was poured out literally and figuratively, as Jesus promised before his passion and death.

Sometimes we talk about this feast as being the birthday of the church as we recall the day much like the child who says to his or her parents, 'Tell me again what happened the day I was born!'

And so we remember that day in the city of Jerusalem when a group of men and women sat huddled inside a house praying and waiting. These were the ones who followed Jesus and witnessed and participated in his ministry. They saw him resurrected and perhaps witnessed his ascent into heaven. They held up in the city just as he told them when the Holy Spirit suddenly came in a rushing wind and tongues of fire. The Spirit filled the entire house and the disciples suddenly found themselves spilling out into the streets, not in fear, but boldly proclaiming the gospel in all sorts of languages, telling the story of Jesus to people far beyond their own town and community. For it happened there were people who had gathered in Jerusalem from all over the world. All of them heard the story of Jesus. All of them heard Peter preaching. And what a word Peter shared even as he borrowed from the prophet Joel:

The Spirit will come upon all flesh. Sons and daughters will prophecy. The young shall see visions and elders will dream dreams. Everyone-slaves, men and women will know the Spirit and they too will prophesy. Signs and wonders will occur and "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

We are told that many were baptized that day. In just a few hours, the church went from a hundred twenty five or so to over three thousand! And before too long, there were added another five thousand! No wonder people call it the birthday of the church.

Every year we hear this remarkable story of Pentecost, the day that the Spirit rained down power from on high and how the first disciples were baptized in the Holy Spirit and were sent out beyond the shores of Galilee to the ends of the earth to witness to the Good News of God in Christ.

Christians throughout generations have celebrated this feast and centuries later we continue to celebrate it with festive liturgies and we decorate our churches with red paraments and vestments and sometimes with banners, flowers, balloons or streamers. People are invited to wear red to be reminded of those burning tongues of fire. We tell the story and try to emulate what it must have been like to hear the message in different languages. We hold on sometimes so tightly to this old, old story that we sometimes think and act as if that there will never, ever be another event like it.

But truth be told, Pentecost wasn't a 'once and for all' occurrence. What made the Pentecost experience memorable that morning wasn't just that the wind blew and people were able to understand and speak in various languages but that the Spirit of truth, the Advocate, that Jesus promised was unleashed into the world, upon men and women, in order that the Good News of God in Christ can be told and lived in all people, for all time, and everywhere.

The truth of the matter is that we need Pentecost like Resurrection to come again and again, each and every day. We need the work of the Spirit which cannot be confined to a specific time or people or to church buildings. We cannot continue to place the Spirit into cute little boxes that we ourselves create or give the Spirit a one day focus. For God's Spirit is much too broad and too big to be contained or pinned down. We know this from the words that Jesus spoke to Nicodemus: *"The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit"* (John 3:8).

Pentecost happens when we allow the Spirit of God to become manifested within each and every one of us; no matter our age, our race, our educational or cultural backgrounds, or our social status. Manifested so that power, God's redeeming power, can change this world so riddled with hatred, division, violence, and dis-ease. Manifested so that dry bones may live again where hope is lost. Manifested so that God's Spirit can use every

single person for the life of the world which includes caring for and loving who and what God has made.

I am sure that some of you watched the royal wedding yesterday. (It was a proud Episcopal moment!) I loved what our presiding bishop, Michael Curry, said in his sermon. He said in part,

“... think and imagine a world where love is the way.

Imagine our homes and families when love is the way.

Imagine neighborhoods and communities when love is the way.

Imagine our governments and nations when love is the way.

Imagine business and commerce when love is the way.

Imagine this tired old world when love is the way.

When love is the way, unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive.

When love is the way, then no child would go to bed hungry in this world ever again.

When love is the way, we will let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness like an ever-flowing brook.

When love is the way, poverty would become history.

When love is the way, the earth will be a sanctuary.

When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields down by the riverside
to study war no more.

When love is the way, there's plenty good room. Plenty good room. For all of God's children.

And when love is the way, we actually treat each other – well, like we're actually family.

When love is the way, we know that God is the source of us all, and we are brothers and sisters. Children of God.

My brothers and sisters, that's a new heaven, a new earth, a new world.

A new human family.*

My friends, in order to love like this, to care like this-we need the Holy Spirit. For this kind of love to happen it takes wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, faith, courage, and strength-these are ALL gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, today more than ever we need the Spirit to come upon all flesh, ALL FLESH, so that a new earth and a new world can come to fruition. We need our sons and daughters to prophecy (and not fear going to school to learn.) We need our young to see visions and you and I need to dream dreams. We need our eyes open to God's amazing presence in the world.

When we allow God's Spirit to move within and through us, we and the world are changed and new life in the Spirit is made possible.

O Spirit of the living God, come among us and upon the world. Breathe on your people as you did on the day of Pentecost. Help us be the people we are meant to be-unafraid of using our individual and corporate gifts and resources. Help us to be a community that is not afraid to vision, to dream, to act-not just for our own welfare but for the welfare of the diocese, our city, the greater community, and the world.

Come, Holy Spirit, come! Inspire us with your power and your love!

Amen!

*portion of the Right Reverend Michael Curry's sermon on the occasion of the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.