

### **Romans 8:22-27**

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redeemer of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

### **Acts 2:1-21**

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. <sup>2</sup> And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. <sup>3</sup> Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. <sup>4</sup> All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

<sup>5</sup> Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup> And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup> Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?” <sup>8</sup> And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? <sup>9</sup> Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup> Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup> Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” <sup>12</sup> All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup> But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

<sup>14</sup> But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. <sup>15</sup> Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup> No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup> ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. <sup>18</sup> Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

<sup>19</sup> And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. <sup>20</sup> The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

<sup>21</sup> Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

## Sermon

Come, Holy Spirit, Come!

Since the beginning, we have talked about the power of God that creates and directs and lifts up and calls out. In the story of creation, it was the ruach, the wind of God that hovers over the waters of chaos. For Elijah, it was the power of creation in earth and wind and fire, and ultimately in the still small voice. In the Psalms, it is the presence of God that brings comfort and forgiveness and power. In the gospels, it is like a dove that descends upon Jesus in his baptism, that initiates the beginning of Jesus ministry. Mathew reminds us that we are to include the Spirit as we go and make disciples. Mark promises that the Spirit will speak for us when we stand before the powers and principalities of this world. Luke reminds us that it was the Spirit that filled the pregnant women, both Mary and Elizabeth whose babies were so important to the story of redemption. And John reminds us of Jesus promise that we are not to be left alone, but that he would send an advocate, the Holy Spirit, to walk with us in the faith.

And then Acts 2 occurred - The Day of Pentecost. Wind and fire, chaos in sight and sound. The disciples began to speak in a cacophony of languages. On looks saw what was happening and started to believe that the disciples were acting like they had too much wine, but others also noticed that among all the noise, they could hear their own native languages, tongues that reminded them of their distant homes, their past lives, but spoke about a present message of life and a future of hope that was based on grace and hope and community and God's unquenchable love.

Come, Holy Spirit, Come!

Last weekend my family and I were all gathered in the St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church for the commencement service of McCormick Theological Seminary (Presbyterian). Naturally, the preacher for the day was a female baptist preacher. Now this was not the first time I had been a part of a congregation that was listening to an African American preacher. I was aware of the style, the passion, the energy that was often brought forth, and she did not disappoint. And even as I considered the content of her message, I also remembered about a sermon I once read.

Barbara Brown Taylor, a white episcopal priest, wrote of this experience. "When I was in Memphis awhile back I had a Sunday off, so I went as far from the Episcopal Church as I could go. I went to Al Green's Full Gospel Tabernacle, where the service begins at eleven and ends around two. There was a huge choir, a three-piece band, and a sound system turned all the way up. There was a church about half-full of people, who drifted in during the first thirty minutes of the service. Sunday school attendance was announced, the collection was taken, and the music began to build - listless at first, then gathered volume and focus until the service was in full swing.

For three full hours, we sang and clapped and raised our hands in the air. Children stood stomping their feet on the pews or crawled around underneath them while their mothers praised God and danced in place. Different members of the choir stepped forward to sing solos, as the band changed tempo to match each one's style. All of the songs had pounding rhythms that built and built until people began to be slain in the spirit. One woman right in front of me bolted from her pew and ran around the perimeter of the church twice, while another one nearer the front stood up and did a jerking dance until she fell on the floor. An usher threw a white sheet over her so that her petticoat would not show, and several members of the church knelt around her until her convulsions stopped.

I felt like I was caught in the middle of a thunderstorm, so I did what you are supposed to do: I made myself very small and held perfectly still. Lightning did not strike me, which was an answer to my prayer, but in the months since then I have wondered about my reaction. Was it simply a reaction to that kind of worship or was it more than that? If I had been in that room on the first Pentecost day, would I have done the same thing? "Oh God, if you are about to pour out your Spirit and this is what it looks like, would you please skip me?"

What Taylor describes and my experience at commencement got me thinking about the role of the Holy Spirit, how especially white western Christians have attempted to reduce that role. From the puritans to the taming of the west, our ancestors have been in the business of domestication and piety. We have spent generations working and passing on to our children a notion of calmness that has led to a dispassionate heart. We have learned that we have the power to calm and control all that we see: the land, horses and cows and all forms of animals, and people - even our own thoughts and emotions. And surely then we can tame the Holy Spirit as well.

For generations we have been relegating the power of the Holy Spirit to the realms of stillness and quiet, to confirmation of our own desires, and to general obscurity. We have called for the Holy Spirit to be present in our worship and lives, but only if the Spirit comes on our terms. We want a spirit that comforts us, not one that challenges our way of being. We want a Spirit that calls us beloved, but not one that drives us into the wilderness of temptation and sin. We want a Spirit that motivates others, but allows us to stay where we are, never questioning our own faith, our own calling. Don't talk about a Spirit that calls us to consider those uncomfortable things, things like students killing other kids and adults in a school in Texas, we may disagree about what to do about guns, but we can all agree that the lives of our children are more important than almost anything. We don't want a Spirit that opens our eyes to the challenges of immigrant communities, we may disagree about the law, but we all can agree that we need to treat people with dignity, as human beings. If the Spirit wants us to share good news to the poor, release to the prisoner, or to clothe the naked, then maybe it is best for us to make ourselves small and pray that we won't be struck by lightning, to uphold our greatest ideals of decency and order.

And so we have tamed the Spirit, relegated her to a small voice that we only listen to when it is convenient for us. And then we wonder why young people say the Church has become irrelevant. We wonder if we have lost our direction, our purpose. Have we stopped dreaming our dreams, seeing God's vision, speaking Good News? I am reminded that birth is anything but decent and in order. It is messy and chaotic, painful and loud, and it is amazing. It is new life!

As Taylor shares in the end of her sermon: "Pentecost is our reminder that there is another side to God's Spirit - one that can set us on fire, transform our lives, turn the world upside down. It is not predictable. It is very risky and it is beyond our control, but one thing we *can* do is fold our umbrellas and put them away. If we want to be fools for Christ, that is. If we want to be clothed with power from on high.

Come, Holy Spirit...