

Acts 2:1-21 *The Message*

A Sound Like a Strong Wind

2 ¹⁻⁴ When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like a strong wind, gale force—no one could tell where it came from. It filled the whole building. Then, like a wildfire, the Holy Spirit spread through their ranks, and they started speaking in a number of different languages as the Spirit prompted them.

⁵⁻¹¹ There were many Jews staying in Jerusalem just then, devout pilgrims from all over the world. When they heard the sound, they came on the run. Then when they heard, one after another, their own mother tongues being spoken, they were thunderstruck. They couldn't for the life of them figure out what was going on, and kept saying, "Aren't these all Galileans? How come we're hearing them talk in our various mother tongues?"

Parthians, Medes, and Elamites;

Visitors from Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia,

Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia,

Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene;

Immigrants from Rome, both Jews and proselytes;

Even Cretans and Arabs!

"They're speaking our languages, describing God's mighty works!"

¹² Their heads were spinning; they couldn't make head or tail of any of it. They talked back and forth, confused: "What's going on here?"

¹³ Others joked, "They're drunk on cheap wine."

Peter Speaks Up

¹⁴⁻²¹ That's when Peter stood up and, backed by the other eleven, spoke out with bold urgency: "Fellow Jews, all of you who are visiting Jerusalem, listen carefully and get this story straight. These people aren't drunk as some of you suspect. They haven't had time to get drunk—it's only nine o'clock in the morning. This is what the prophet Joel announced would happen: "In the Last Days," God says, "I will pour out my Spirit on every kind of people: Your sons will prophesy, also your daughters; Your young men will see visions, your old men dream dreams.

When the time comes, I'll pour out my Spirit on those who serve me, men and women both, and they'll prophesy. I'll set wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth below, Blood and fire and billowing smoke, the sun turning black and the moon blood-red, Before the Day of the Lord arrives, the Day tremendous and marvelous; And whoever calls out for help to me, God, will be saved."

PRAYER: *"Spirit of the Living God, Fall Afresh on Us;*

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us. Melt us, Mold us, Fill us, Use us.

Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on us."

"How Christ Reaches Us"

Have you ever been in a situation where you just did not know what to think or do or say? As human beings, most of us find ourselves in such a situation from time to time. More often, I think of just the right thing to say....after the situation has passed!

Perhaps you are in a classroom when the teacher asks for feedback. An idea bursts into your head, and you know it is a good idea. But finding the right words to articulate that good idea will take longer than the time allowed by the teacher. Perhaps you overhear one person berate another: a husband belittles his wife, a middle school girl bullies another student. You know you should intervene, but how? You pass a homeless person on the street, and think to yourself, "He, too, is a child of God." You are moved to say or do something, but your mind quickly fills with reasons not to: you wouldn't want to make him dependent on handouts, he might spend money on cigarettes, beer, or even drugs. He might be dangerous if you interact with him. And so you walk by, your conscience gnawing at your heart.

Frozen....sometimes our internal struggles leave us frozen for far too long.

But today is PENTECOST: the birthday of the Church, a crucial moment in our history and faith journey. Before Pentecost, the disciples were kind of frozen. They had known Jesus when he was alive, and had met him after the resurrection. But they didn't know what to say or do next. They do not know how to BE disciples in this new reality. As faithful Jews, they showed up in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks, the harvest festival, as they always did, along with a few thousand others..

Then it happened! The sound was like the rush of a mighty wind! There were tongues of flame resting upon them, literally melting away that which kept them frozen. And then the words came rolling right out of their mouths: unbidden, yet coherent in several different languages, as if a Spirit were speaking right through them. They were words of joy and hope and love. The words were proclaiming salvation for the world. The risen Christ had come to them in a new way -- through his Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

The noise brought curious people running. "What on earth is going on here? Aren't these all Galileans? Where did he learn Arabic? Has she been drinking?" "NO! Listen -- they are all talking about God's grace -- how God brought Israel through the Sea, and now the man, Jesus, has overcome death!"

This is the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy, that unlikely people, common people of every gender, age, and status, would be empowered to proclaim God's healing. Many heard and believed in the gospel of Jesus Christ that day - - 3000 were baptized!

Now: close your eyes a moment. Imagine the Spirit blowing through THIS place, flames dancing, a rush of power into your hearts, calling you to **speak** good news, to **live** good news, to **be** good news in this world. *You may open your eyes now!! I don't want you to fall asleep!!*

The good news I offer to you today is that in Christ, you are a new creation! You were baptized into a LOVE that will not let you go. You are accepted, even if voices within and outside yourself tell you otherwise. You are forgiven of even the worst mistakes, angers, words and actions that haunt your mind. You are beautiful, created in God's image, and gifted in ways the world desperately needs. You are part of something bigger than yourself, a community of faith and hope, a movement not bounded by time or space, a life that is eternal. All of this is yours! And the Spirit has chosen YOU to be one of God's witnesses, to share all that you've been given. The Spirit wants to thaw that which is frozen within you, and set your spirit free to be all that God created you to be!

I experienced something beautiful this week at our Annual Conference sessions. There was a new-found freedom for folks to express themselves as God created them. There were some speaking Spanish, English, German, Korean and languages of the heart. There were persons of all ages embracing, holding hands, sharing life stories to combat racism. There were those who spoke openly from different life perspectives: heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, beloved family members. Some sang with gusto, others quietly, some with hands waving, others more reserved, some clapping and

dancing, others remaining in their seats due to disabilities. It was like Pentecost all over again! God gave each one a unique utterance, and a unique story of God's love to tell, a unique way of speaking of hope for the future of the body of Christ. And it was beautiful to behold.

It is so powerful to see, hear, and experience the sharing of Christ's gospel across all kinds of differences that could have been barriers to the sharing of divine love. You, too, can use the gift of the Spirit to speak when you feel called to share in the Spirit's power. You may be in a classroom or in a meeting, and have an innovative idea that would brighten everyone's day. You may suddenly have the courage to intervene when you see a person taking advantage of another. You may be humble enough to reach out to a person you've harmed to seek forgiveness. You may teach a child about Jesus. You may heal a wounded heart with enough love to listen and care.

And CONFIRMANDS, please know that you are as gifted and called as anyone else. You are marked with the seal of Christ's love, and filled with the Spirit to serve Christ in this life. You are gifted for ministry. You may still feel frozen from time to time. But the Spirit of the Living Christ is sent to thaw you out, and lift you up, that you may speak of love and forgiveness, and act in ways that unite and show the love of which you speak. May it be so for each of us and all of us together. May we live in the Spirit's power.

Happy Birthday, Church!

Congratulations, Confirmands!

Amen.