

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"What does the Holy Spirit do?"
Dr. J. Dent

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(The Season of Pentecost)

Today is Trinity Sunday, and last week we had a presentation of Mission Awareness Sunday, and hopefully the mothers among us were honored, because it was also Mothers' Day. Last week was also Pentecost Sunday and the season after Pentecost is considered "ordinary time" in the Common Lectionary. But there is nothing ordinary about Pentecost, nor about the Holy Spirit who is honored at the feast of Pentecost. We know something of the mystery of the Trinity, but many of us know very little of who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit does.

The Nicene Creed gives a brief summary of what the Bible says about the Holy Spirit. This creed is in the *Book of Praise* at number 578. It says "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets." So here we find the Holy Spirit is God, intimately connected with the community of the Trinity, who is worshipped as God along with the Father and the Son. The Spirit is noted to have spoken through the prophets. The Scriptures are noted to be "God-breathed" by Paul in his second epistle to Timothy, 3:16. The Holy Spirit speaks to us through the Scriptures.

The reason Pentecost focuses on the Holy Spirit, is because of what happened at the ancient feast of Pentecost just after Jesus' ascension. Pentecost occurs 50 days after Passover, which is what the word Pentecost "50" means in Greek. It was originally the completion of the barley harvest, and the celebration of the feast of weeks (seven weeks plus one day after Passover). Many internationals would come for this harvest celebration, celebrating the faithfulness of God to the people of God, not only for Passover, but also for the harvest of a new year.

And it was at this festival, that God poured out the Holy Spirit upon the new Church, and invited people from many countries and many languages to become a part of the Church. Here we see anew that the heart of God is for an international, multi-cultural church.

What was the Holy Spirit's part in forming this Church, of which we are a part, these many centuries later? There was a **sound**, which Luke describes as the blowing of a violent wind. This wind symbolized power and a sovereign ability to influence people. This sound brings us to the words for Spirit, *ruah*, breath or spirit, and *pneuma*, breath or spirit. We cannot control or predict what influence there might be in this. God comes upon ordinary believers as he comes upon the prophets of old. The Holy Spirit is fulfilling the prophecy of Joel, chapter 2. But besides this sound, is a **sight**. And that sight is mysterious, but the best the author can do is to say it looks like tongues of fire. This too is symbolic, although it did actually happen. It is symbolic of the languages given supernaturally to the disciples, so that all the people from the many nations could understand what God was doing. The fire brings to mind, the pillar of fire by night, when the Israelites came out of Egypt. The fire was the very presence of God. The fire also symbolizes judgment. So this is a presentation of God the Holy Spirit, who is the presence of God and the present choice of yielding to what God is doing, or not. Do you hear the call right now to yield to God?

But the bystanders didn't understand what was happening. It was new life happening, but like much related to new life, it was messy. Just like the way we come into this world, it is messy. Babies are messy. They disrupt your routine and the control you think you have on your life. They often disrupt the audio portion of our services, and I remind parents that I love to hear the new life in the church. Parents need to know how I feel.

God wanted the people to know at Pentecost what was going on. So this sight and this sound needed interpreting.

So someone from the crowd stated his thesis, his educated guess. Since this person probably was one that did not understand any of the foreign languages being spoken, he figured that these followers of Jesus were simply babbling due to the influence of alcohol, having had too much new wine.

But Peter put forth another interpretation. These are not party-ers in the way you think. Even the neighbors drink and play their loud music only until 4 or 5 or 6 o'clock in the morning. No, it is 9 am and no one here is drunk. What you are seeing is the power of God at work, and people hearing what they need to hear to believe the Gospel of Jesus Christ. ...What do you need to hear to heed the Gospel of Jesus Christ today? Anew? Afresh?

The Holy Spirit was coming into people like air into our lungs, filling us up, causing us to live, just as God breathed that first breath into the first human being, just as Jesus breathed upon his disciples at one of the resurrection appearances. The Holy Spirit takes up residence in us, as Paul says, don't you know that everyone who knows Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour, is the temple of the Holy Spirit? That's why we are supposed to take care of our bodies, which are the temple of the Holy Spirit. But that's another sermon.

The Holy Spirit convicts us of the truth, (John 16:13) leads us to Christ and to the Father, and fills us up with life and begins transforming us to be more like Christ, with the understanding that we are missionaries, on a mission, right here, right now, to show others the reality of God and the reality of Jesus, by how God has changed us.

How has God changed you? Is there something in your life that you know without a doubt is the hand of the Lord in your life? Begin to gather the descriptions of those God-breathed changes in your treasure box, to share with others.

The Holy Spirit spoke through those believers to others so they could hear and realize how loved they were by God. The Holy Spirit still wants to speak through you and me, of how we are and how others are so deeply loved by God. That's Pentecost in a nutshell. I believe God still enables today some people to speak in languages they have never learned to bring others to God. He also speaks cross-culturally and in spite of ourselves to others in the language they need to hear. The Pentecost continues through us.

But the Holy Spirit does more than just welcome people into the family of God. The Holy Spirit is a gift giver. It is one way that we can know we are loved, by receiving a gift or gifts from the Holy Spirit. Everyone here has at least one gift. In the Corinthian church, they had lots of gifts.

Paul had to talk about the Holy Spirit and the gifts that the Spirit gives, because the church was fighting over them. People are given spiritual gifts to build up the church, to build up the body of Christ, but instead in the Corinthian church they were being used to tear it down. So for instance, take the gift of prophesy. This gift has been given to the people of God over thousands of years. Moses had the gift, and many others since. We read

that passage in Numbers 11, where even Medad and Eldad prophesied, even though they weren't in the right place to prophesy. Prophecy is just saying what God wants you to say, being a spokesperson, if you will, for God. In Corinth, several had this gift, but instead of trying to build up the church with the gift, they were insisting on their right to use the gift, and there was chaos in the worship service, as many were trying to speak at once. Have you ever been to a wedding or a reception or any place where there has been an "open microphone" and people are competing to use the mike? That's what I imagine it to have been like. But God wanted orderly worship, as well as the life giving words of prophecy, so Paul taught that all these diverse gifts were good. But people had to work together to make them work. Wisdom, knowledge, extreme trust in God, physical, emotional and spiritual healing, miracles, prophecy, spiritual discernment, unknown languages, whether unlearned languages to speak to others, or unlearned prayer languages to speak to God, the point was to build up the church with the gift. And so Paul instructed the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 14, that if someone spoke in an unknown language, someone needed to interpret that language so that the church could be built up, not confused.

The Holy Spirit gives all these gifts out of love to creatively show God's love, and to draw people everywhere to Jesus. The Holy Spirit sovereignly activates and allocates these gifts, just as the wind blows, and we see the effect, but cannot predict where the wind will move.

Last Sunday on top of all the other events celebrated, was the Global Day of Prayer. Many met to pray for such an outpouring to happen anew in our city, in our province, in our country, in our world. We need the reality of God to transform our reality.

As we thank God for the harvest, and the abundance that we have (there's an idea to thank God every time you go to get groceries, not so you don't have to pray at meals), but so that the attitude of gratitude permeates who you are.

The Holy Spirit resides in us who believe. Let us give thanks. Let us speak of the reality of God in our lives, and build up the church, across denomination. Resist the temptation to speak against other churches or denominations. Build up the body of Christ and be an active agent for the Holy Spirit.

Let us pray.