

“Helped by the Spirit”

May 24, 2015

Pentecost Sunday, Memorial Day, Aldersgate, Consecration of Memorials

“²⁶And the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness...”

These are powerful words, and Paul must have known about the power of the Holy Spirit. I don't know where he was when the Spirit came so powerfully that day in Jerusalem, but Paul knew something about the power of the Holy Spirit. He knew that what Jesus promised was true: the Spirit is an advocate - the One who stands alongside us supports us, helps us in our weakness.

And that's what today is about - not wallowing in our weakness, but remembering again that God gives us a power - that we are not alone. I hope that you experienced a bit of the chaos that might have been that first Pentecost. Wind, fire, languages - what an incredible time! For all of us who'd like to think that Holy Spirit comes only in quiet moments when we're ready - think again! The Spirit comes powerfully, and it changes people forever!

Somehow people of diverse backgrounds with different experiences who speak different languages come together in unity! Somehow harmony comes out of chaos. This isn't an idealistic picture - this is the work of God! This is just what happened long ago in Jerusalem - it's also what happens right now! This is the Holy Spirit that is still active and alive and well in our midst - nudging us to trust, bringing us to deeper faith, helping us when we have questions, encouraging us, inspiring us to keep on going. That's the work of the Spirit! And still sometimes people look and shake their heads and say things like, “Look, they must be drunk!”

Remember that when Jesus ascended, his followers had to deal with his absence. It's Pentecost that makes it clear that God's presence is alive in the community of believers. When Jesus ascended into heaven, the light didn't go out, but the light shines in those who believe in Jesus. And it takes the church - the whole Body of Christ in the world - to share the light and hold out hope to people who need it.

It takes the church to live out the promise of Pentecost:

- ...to allow the Holy Spirit to work and inspire us again
- ...to show the Holy Spirit's power and presence to the world
- ...to show the love and hope of Jesus Christ to the world
- ...to bring revival
- ...to encourage people

...to reach out to meet needs and help people understand that we serve in the name and power of Jesus Christ – not on our own! The Spirit helps us in our weakness...

God sends the Holy Spirit during a major harvest festival in Jerusalem that came 50 days after the Passover feast when Jewish males came to Jerusalem with their first grain offerings. It's called Shavuot (sha-voo-oat) or the Feast of Weeks. They celebrated the gift of the Torah – Jewish Law – to God's people. People made a long pilgrimage with grain offerings to celebrate God's faithfulness and goodness in their lives.

What's so interesting is that the Holy Spirit comes to a community of people— not to one person sitting alone, but to the disciples and all who were with them. It was a busy time in Jerusalem. Many people from many places were together. Somehow this moment in God's time gathered people and helped them understand one another in a new way. It is a sacred moment that we celebrate as Christians who live and hope to be the Body of Christ. But we have to do more than celebrate. We have to claim it and continue on.

The Holy Spirit is fuel for the church! The Spirit is given to us for FREE! But we must use it! We also have to understand that the Holy Spirit is mysterious. To live a life of faith in Jesus Christ means that we claim the Holy Spirit, which works in ways we don't understand – and ways we never imagined.

Jesus calls the Spirit *parakletos*, which means "Counselor" or "Advocate" in Greek. Ideally, a counselor or advocate provides nurture and help to us, someone who is on our side. This is a wonderful promise to have when Jesus ascends into heaven. But to describe the Holy Spirit as "Counselor" or "Advocate" also means that we have to be open to the Spirit and submit to its power and guidance. We have to be ready to be challenged and transformed. Be assured - trusting in the Holy Spirit will change us.

Jesus also uses the term "Spirit of truth." The Holy Spirit teaches us and helps us to remember our connection to God through Jesus Christ. If we think that it's easy to rely on the Holy Spirit, Jesus reminds us that it's difficult to live life relying on the Holy Spirit to guide us. It takes strength and courage. We'll be convicted and challenged about who we really are and who God really wants us to be. But still there's the promise of God's presence with us – helping us to grow.

The Holy Spirit is a gift from God – not something we can create or manipulate. The Spirit moves where it will, and God works in ways we never expected. It can be startling and unsettling when the Spirit moves. It's unexpected. It might mean that change is coming.

And the Spirit brought people together out of confusion. There was a boldness among them – a certainty that God was working. Luke is clear to say “they were all together in one place.” So the power of God isn’t for one person to hold onto. Its power that’s most alive and visible when people are gathered together – in worship, times of fellowship, and yes, even in meetings! These were real people like you and me. God works with real people to fulfill God’s promises. The Spirit helps us in our weakness...

The Holy Spirit gave the people energy so bold that it changed who they were – from scared, timid learners into apostles ready and willing to speak for God. We hear it in Peter’s speech – he’s bold enough to say that the promises to the Hebrew people from the prophet Joel about the Spirit being poured out is now a reality!

The Holy Spirit inspires and empowers the Church. It is God’s power channeled for God’s purposes. The Spirit gives power to speak God’s Word in ways that people understand. The Spirit gives power to think in new and fresh ways. God sends the Spirit to help us be the Body of Christ in witness and mission to all the world.

It was on May 24, 1738 that John Wesley who founded the Methodist movement in England described a powerful experience. He said his heart was strangely warmed at a Bible study and prayer meeting. It wasn’t that he didn’t believe, but he understood God’s grace in a new and powerful. He said: *I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.*

Perhaps you’re seeking God; you need a revival of spirit, a rekindling of passion for doing God’s work, a renewal of energy for your ministry, a chance to hear God speak in a way you understand. That’s what Pentecost is about – wind and fire are weak descriptions of what happened that day in Jerusalem. But God seeks to help us in our daily lives through the Spirit.

We are called to be prophets who tell God’s truth. We are called to be visionaries who see beyond what’s visible and current. We’re called to be dreamers who hope beyond what is reality. And it’s the Holy Spirit – that force and power we sometimes overlook – that helps us do it. The Spirit helps us in our weakness...

A priest named Adam of St. Victor lived in the 1700’s. He wrote prayers to be sung in the abbey of St. Victor in Paris. These are his words from a prayer for Pentecost:

My heart was weary, but now it is eager for love.

My soul was sad, but now it is full of joy.

Jesus gave his life for me.

Now you, Holy Spirit, give me to him.

Friends, the power of Pentecost is never spent or gone or low. It's not a human power, but the very power of God. And God is faithful. God continues to pour out the Holy Spirit in the community of faith. God continues to get our attention – sometimes in outlandish ways that we don't ever expect, but also in the not-so-spectacular ways. But God is working and helping us through the Holy Spirit - to pray, to serve, to care.

May we pay attention and be ready to receive God's help.

Thanks be to God. AMEN!