



SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE
in the City of New York
The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector
www.SaintThomasChurch.org

Sunday, May 31, 2020
The Day of Pentecost (Whitsunday)

Solemn Eucharist
at 11am

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A Sermon by
The Reverend Alison J. Turner,
Associate for Children and Family Ministry
on
Acts 2:1-21, 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13, John 20:19-23
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Pentecost Sunday

We all know something about waiting for things that are unknown, fearful and uncertain as well as life giving. We all know something about waiting for those pivotal moments, which will change our lives forever.

I remember being with my grandmother by her bedside watching, praying and waiting for hours and then all of a sudden it was time, her time to slip away from pain to glory, as she took her last breath.

Another waiting time was in the hospital, as we waited for what felt like an eternity for my grandson Edward to arrive from the cozy, dark, warm place of his mother's womb, then wait and watch until we could hear him gently take his first breath in this world. So powerful, so precious- that first breath that told us he is here, he is alive.

Today as we recall the coming of the Holy Spirit, one of the most dramatic stories in the New Testament. We hear how of the disciples' transition from a time of waiting, of uncertainty to encounter a new life, as the holy spirit brings breath, life into their lives. A new era has begun. A new and radical life in the Spirit. An era of hope, of confidence, to such a degree that it was soon to be said about the disciples, "Here are those who are turning the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

Our first reading sets the scene and in this post Ascension they wait. Unsettled impatient, agitated, trying to keep busy, each dealing with waiting in their own way-filling the time of waiting for news, a sign, just anything, in their new normal without him. While they had instructions: "to stay here in the city" they stay inside bearing the Jesus promise, as recorded by John: "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you,". Though I guess that just added to the pain of waiting- He said he's coming, but when? How? How long will this staying in, this "lockdown:", this waiting go on?

Acts 2 gives us a vivid picture of the disciples in semi-hibernation, and how their waiting lives are suddenly disrupted, invaded, senses assaulted, as a violent wind makes a terrifying noise, perhaps as daunting as the sound of multiples sirens, of recent months, and fire like a divided tongue enters burning upon their heads. But.... to our surprise, this time they are not afraid. Fear is transformed. Jesus' promise of peace is realized, joy is amongst them and the words of Jesus are fulfilled 'As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' and he had breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'

A spirit that know no barriers it, and has no bounds. As the resurrected Christ can move through unopened doors and windows, the spirit too is not confined by constrictions of our minds or barriers we place in our hearts.

Dramatic symbols of Pentecost, of wind, of doves, and flames are being worn decorated and created throughout Christian communities today, even for *Sunday Zoom!* this morning. Symbols that attempt to articulate the sacred mystery which we celebrate today in the coming of the Holy Spirit.

The flames we envision are not of the destructive kind but are a fire which will change the world around, bearing new life, bringing in hope.

Like the single flame being passed from the Vigil Fire to enlighten a darkened church, one small act or flame of kindness or comfort has the power to spread, to create a beacon of hope of light as we see in the Eternal Flame in Arlington cemetery and Virginia or Yad Vashem, Jerusalem. Like the Olympic flame being passed as a torch over boundaries and across nations. Fire is a powerful symbol of remembrance, of hope, of life.

Then we have the symbol of wind, of breath, of Ruakh, that familiar Hebrew word which describes an invisible, powerful energy, necessary for life seen throughout scripture. Even before creation began, we see a depiction of the spirit of God hovering over the dark, disordered waters of the earth, later we hear God breathed His Spirit into the nostrils of Adam, who became a living soul. The dry bones in the valley in Ezekiel 37 did not move until the life giving Spirit of God blew over them. All of which point to the words of the Creed we shall declare shortly, "We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life".

The giver of life, the spirit which not just touched but filled those first disciples fathering them forth with gifts to equip them as they move from a time of waiting or growing to one of renewed service, including gifts of wisdom, knowledge, healing, faith, preaching, discernment, and interpretation.

Though as Paul reminds us, perhaps most importantly, while there are a variety of gifts, each gift comes from the same Spirit, the same Lord. We too are called like those first disciples to share our gifts, to work together for we all belong to one body, the body of Christ, and each part counts.

As a teenager I went to several different churches for charismatic services and youth events and rallies, in some places, it was implied and even taught that there was only one way to live walk and talk like a Christian and other traditional forms of Christianity simply didn't count. It was rather formulaic, even competitive in one Christian Union, for if you loved Jesus you would have more of these gifts.

However, I learned early on even with great bold, courageous and confident Christians with a whole stream of Corinthian style spiritual gifts, that was only one way of loving. To be spirit filled could come in many guises. Joy in the Lord could come in many ways. In the life of living saints, there are many gifts, many ways of living a spirit led life and a spirit filled life: in the gentle sister of the sacred compassion who prayed, every day who nursed the surviving lepers in the hospital, in the people who were home bound who prayed, or knitted a prayer into their shawl for the hospital. In those who had little or no voice with extreme disabilities who humbled me with their trust.

I learned and continue to see here and now, as small flames begin a fire, as one breath leads to life, a life filled with the spirit can be manifest in gentle, small, still as well as big and bold ways to talk, act and praise,

As the birthday of the church today, Pentecost, marks the outpouring of the Holy Spirit We are reminded that the spirit equips us to do the work of God to live in and welcome others into that Body or what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. often referred to as "The Beloved Community."

A church community which over recent months has met trauma, challenge and opportunity, to which we have all responded with a whole spectrum of emotion.

Many lives have and are being transformed not only economically or physically, even down to our appearance, but inwardly. We are seeing the spirit of God in many ways that people are reaching out, sharing joy and giving hope to others with gestures as small yet powerful first flickering Easter flame. We are rediscovering as Bishop Shin said in his Visitation Zoom at Coffee hour a couple of weeks ago, “The Church is as big as the world”, for we in the midst of hibernation are discovering ways of being church, of being the body of Christ in ways that we may have previously negated. As Bishop Andrew Saint John recently highlighted, in digital ways that have the potential for good in creating connections for those who are suffering¹

We too are becoming aware of our deep rooted need for creativity, faithfulness and community and encountering a rediscovery of our “innate desire to connect.....to forge lasting bonds with others, to help one another, and to share life experiences.....We are, simply, better together”.²
Today as we mark the Church’s birthday we give thanks for God’s spirit among us and welcome God’s fresh outpouring of his spirit upon us, for us all to “Receive the Holy Spirit”.

But first let us pause, as Sister Promise regularly encourages us to do, to take note of our breath, of God who is breathing his spirit in you, right now, for ‘It is the spirit of God who has made you, the Breath of the Almighty has given you life.’ (Job 33:4)

¹ ref. Dr.Deanna A. Thomson, *The Virtual Body of Christ in a Suffering World* (Abingdon, 2016)

² Vivek. H. Murthy M.D. *Together: The Healing Power of Human Connection in a Sometimes Lonely World* (New York, April 2020)