

“God’s Transforming Power”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday May 31, 2020

Acts 2:1-21

Today is Pentecost Sunday, the day the church celebrates that the Holy Spirit was let loose amongst God’s people and the church was born.

“When the Feast of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Without warning there was a sound like 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 rank, and they started to speak, speaking in a number of different languages as the Holy Spirit prompted them.” (The Message)

A strong, gale force wind, wildfire spread through their rank. This was no silent gift, but a birthing with loud cries and chaos.

I’m reminded of Annie Dillard’s words:

On the whole, I do not find Christians, sufficiently sensible of conditions. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning. It’s madness to wear ladies’ straw hats and velvet hats to church, we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares, they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping god may wake someday and take offense, or the waking god may draw us out to where we can never return.” (Annie Dillard “Teaching a stone to Talk”)

“The waking God may draw us out to where we can never return.” That is the power of Pentecost, the power of the Holy Spirit unleashed in the church.

The Holy Spirit fell upon the disciples, they were transformed.

The disciples had been sitting, praying, celebrating their Jewish Feast of Pentecost.

Jesus had told them to pray and wait for the gift.

When the gift arrived it drove them outside into the world praising God, telling of God’s marvelous deeds.

From that moment, the church was born.

Nothing would ever be the same again.

Walter Brueggemann prays these words:

We name you wind, power, force, and then imaginatively "Third Person."

We name you and you blow...

Blow hard, blow cold,

Blow hot, blow strong,

Blow gentle, blow new...

Blowing the world out of nothing to abundance,

Blowing the church out of despair to new life,

Blowing to make things new that never were.

So blow this day, wind,

Blow here, there, power,

Blow even us, force.

Rush us beyond ourselves,

Rush us beyond our hopes,

Rush us beyond our fears, until we enact

Your newness in the world.

Come, come Spirit.

(Walter Brueggemann "Awed to Heaven, rooted to earth")

We sang the words this morning:

"I will never be the same again, I will never return, I've closed the door, I will walk the mile, I'll run the race, and I will never be the same again."

That is accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit in us.

In Annie Dillard's words, "The waking god *draws us out to where we can never return.*"

In the words of Walter Brueggemann;

The Holy Spirit

Rush us beyond ourselves,

Rush us beyond our hopes,

Rush us beyond our fears

The Holy Spirit draws us in places we would never have chosen to go, and has pushed us beyond ourselves, beyond our hopes and beyond our fears.

When the Holy Spirit comes upon us, and calls us, we are changed – often not radically – but a new course is set.

A one degree change of course doesn't make a big difference in the short term, but over a mile it will change your course by 92 ft.

If you were travelling from Vancouver to Ottawa, you would miss Ottawa by about 42 miles, by changing course by just one degree.

The Holy Spirit usually does more than just change us by one degree, but often we are moved one degree at a time, one course change and then another, one step and then another step towards Christ, over a life time.

One of my greatest joys in ministry is to see people grow and change – to do what they said they could never do, to find themselves in wonderfully unexpected places, delighting in God who led them.

They proclaim God's marvelous ways, praise God's name.

At the beginning we are often fearful.

We want to be grasped by God's word, and God's Spirit, but we are afraid it will upset our plans; afraid it will inconvenience our comfort, or unsettle us.

And it I can pretty much guarantee that God will do all those things.

We will be inconvenienced, made uncomfortable and unsettled, but it leads to life, and is the path of discipleship.

It is a great adventure- and we get to travel with some wonderful people- and with the work of the Holy Spirit in us, we see lives changes, we see miracles enacted, and God uses us- humble vessels that we are to do the work of heaven.

Once long ago, God's Spirit breathed upon a roomful of disciples and the church was sent out, born, given life.

Suddenly it is clear that God is with us.

We, as part of God's new people notice that God works newness amongst us,
for we know about being
lame people who walk,
blind people who see,
dead people who live,

In Pentecost we celebrate God's Spirit at work making, birthing, giving life to us as a people and as a church.

That hasn't changed.

This pandemic has changed lots of things – and it has changed how we do the ministries we do.

But this day is God's day.

And with the work of the Holy Spirit in us, not only are we being transformed, but we are living so God's kingdom is being established in its fullness.

All glory, honour and praise be to God.

Amen.

Prayer:

Holy God, what an amazing day of celebration. At Pentecost your Spirit blew, the church was birthed, we celebrate the church's birthday. Holy God you bring newness of life, so we will not fear, and trust that as you have been with us, you will be with us still. Show us how to be your church and your people today, for we pray in the name of Jesus Christ, the only King and Head of our Church, Amen.