5-31-20, The Holy Way

Sermon on Acts 2:1—18

1. Introduction
2. For most Christians, Pentecost marks the beginning of the church or, more particularly, the giving of the Holy Spirit to the church.
3. In the time of Jesus, Pentecost was the Feast of Weeks, a one-day festival celebrating the beginning of the wheat harvest. It occurred fifty days after Passover.
4. There is a linguistic feature that is helpful in understanding the symbolism of Pentecost. In Hebrew, the word *ruach* refers to breath, wind, and spirit. Similarly, in Greek, the word *pneuma* refers to these same three concepts, breath, wind, and Spirit.
5. The tradition of wearing red on Pentecost comes from the idea of red being the color associated with the Holy Spirit, in the tongues of what looked like fire which descended upon Jesus’ followers.
6. Prayer
7. The text
8. (v. 1—4) When the day of Pentecost had come, they [the followers of Jesus, including the twelve and, almost certainly, the women who had so faithfully followed him] were all together in one place
9. (v. 2) And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.
10. (v. 3) Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them and a tongue rested on each of them.
11. (v. 4) All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.
12. (v. 5—13) Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem.
13. (v. 6) And at this sound [probably both the sound of the wind and the sound of disciples speaking in a number of languages simultaneously] the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. [These individuals were Jewish, but they came from every place in the Roman Empire where Judaism had spread. Presumably each spoke some amount of Aramaic ( the successor language to Hebrew) and Greek (which virtually everyone in the Middle East spoke to some extent), but they also would have spoken the language of the country where they had lived, and it was these languages which they were hearing from the disciples.]
14. (v. 7—11) Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? [This is a little like saying, “Wait a minute. Aren’t these guys from Ajo? What’s going on here?”] And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites [these were from the eastern part of the Roman Empire] and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, and Cappadocia [these are farther west in the Empire], Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs [both island people and desert people]—in our own language we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.”
15. (v. 12) All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”
16. (v. 14) But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”
17. (v. 14—18) **Peter’s response** But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you and listen to what I say.
18. (v. 15) Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. [In a culture where breakfast was not eaten until 10:00 am, it was unthinkable that anyone would be drinking wine before breakfast.]
19. (v. 16—18) No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel [Joel 2:28) In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women [this will happen to every social class, from top to bottom], in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.’”
20. What does this Scripture say to us today?

The first and most powerful message of this passage is that we, the church, are not on our own. This is a vital thing to understand, especially in today’s environment. We don’t really know what comes next. We don’t know for sure when we’ll be able to gather for worship again. We don’t know what worship is going to look like. We don’t know what will and will not be possible for the foreseeable future.

But in the midst of all this confusion and uncertainty, we know, and we cling to the fact, that God has given the Holy Spirit to the church. We are not alone. Returning to worship will be a new experience for all of us, including me.

We do know, though, that the Holy Spirit of God will be there, just as Holy Spirit has been with us in every one of our separated worship services.

In some significant ways, this is a congregation which has some tools to weather this transition to whatever our new normal will be. Every year, about half of our congregation leaves to spend the summer months somewhere else. Does that stop us from functioning as a church? Certainly not! Does it prevent us from reaching out in support of those who are in need? Of course not! This is a church which adapts to the situation it’s in. And that’s what we will need to do as we discover what the new normal for The Holy Way will be.

You may think that this quarantine environment has stopped us from taking the necessary steps to call a new pastor, but you’d be mistaken. As you all know, our next step is to prepare and submit a mission study. Our Mission Study Team is actively engaged in the preparation of this mission study. I have a very sincere hope that, by the end of the summer, this mission study will be both submitted and approved by presbytery. This will only happen, though, by the ongoing leadership of Holy Spirit.

I have a very sincere hope that, in the fall, a Pastor Nominating Committee will be in place and beginning its work. And I have a very sincere hope that, by this time next year, you will have a new pastor, settled in and blessing this church, all through the leading and the power of Holy Spirit.

So, John, what do we do now? Friends, we do what we have been doing. We pray, and we sing, and we cling to God’s Word and words, and we rejoice that Jesus is the Head of the Church, and we keep going. May we do that, and may we be found rejoicing as we continue our journey. May it be so. Amen