

## The Spirit Draws Us

“When the day of Pentecost had come, the disciples were all together in one place. 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. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. And all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.”

When the day of Pentecost had come, the Holy Spirit came like wind and fire, and inspired—*inspired*—the disciples to become the Church. And because of that event you and I are here today, celebrating this Pentecost, being filled with the Spirit ourselves, so that *we* now can be the Church.

Wind and fire are the Bible’s two favorite symbols for the Holy Spirit. And of the two I think *fire* is the one we recognize most readily. The church is dressed in red today, my vestments are red, many of you are wearing red, because red is the color of fire, and fire is the symbol for the Spirit. A lot of red vestments for churches actually have flame patterns worked into them, to signify the fire of the Spirit. In prayer we ask the Holy Spirit to kindle in us the fire of God’s love. We make a strong connection between the Holy Spirit and fire.

But I also think the symbol of *wind* has a lot to tell us about the Spirit. The Genesis creation story says that the Spirit moved like a wind over the face of the deep in the beginning of Creation. Our psalm today speaks of how God sends forth the Spirit and it blows the breath of life into beings, and so the Spirit renews the face of the earth. And of course the connection between wind and breath and Spirit—the connection between the atmosphere which is within us and the atmosphere which is so much larger all around us—is a favorite symbol for the way our human spirits are held and nurtured and empowered in divine Spirit.

A professor of mine at Vanderbilt had another wind-image that he liked to use to point to something important about the Spirit. Professor Hodgson liked to sail, and he explained to us in class that the wind works on sailboats differently from the way most of us think it works. We tend to think that the wind fills the sail, and the wind *pushes* the sail and its sailboat ahead through the water. But in point of fact the physics of sailing are quite different. The wind fills the sail, and the sail creates a bowed, rounded shape—kind of like the wing of an airplane—and as the wind spills around this wing-like shape, it creates a little vacuum, a little open space, just ahead of the sail. That vacuum, that open space, pulls the sail into it—so the wind actually ends up *drawing* the sailboat forward, not *pushing* the sailboat from behind, but *drawing* the sailboat from ahead. And that, said Professor Hodgson, is how the Spirit works with us: the Spirit fills us, and surrounds us, and creates an open space ahead of us, a space for visions and dreams and possibilities, a space which draws us into God, a space which draws us toward God’s preferred future for us.

I think that notion of the Spirit *drawing* us onward into God is a marvelous way to talk about what Pentecost means. We see it in all our scripture readings this morning. We can see it in our Gospel reading, when Jesus promises his disciples that the Holy Spirit will come to them once he himself has gone away. Jesus says, “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” The Spirit declares to us what is to come; the Spirit opens up before us the future God wants for us; the Spirit draws us into the possibilities and potentialities God gives us to become more like Jesus. Jesus says the Spirit “will take what is mine and declare it to you”—and that means it is the Spirit that draws us into living more Christlike lives, the Spirit that fill us and empowers us to love in the way that Jesus loves, and to work in the way that Jesus works, and to live in the way that Jesus lives. According to the Gospel, it is the work of the Spirit to draw us into being the Christlike people God wants us to be.

And according to the Epistle reading today, that drawing of the Spirit is meant not just for us, but for the entire Creation. Paul says “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now”—the entire Creation, the whole Universe, is like one big process of giving birth, one shared growth toward the reign of God’s justice and peace and love. And the Spirit is what draws the Creation forward toward that fulfillment. We ourselves, we followers of Jesus, have the first-fruits of the Spirit, we have been gifted by God to know that we are part of that drawing-forward to justice and peace and love. But, Paul says, we also know we still have a long

way to go, we look around us and see that the world is still far from the fullness of justice and peace and love that is God's real desire for us. And precisely because we see we have a long way to go, Paul says, the Spirit gives us another gift: the Spirit gives us hope, the Spirit gives us trust in the newness of life we have glimpsed in Jesus but do not yet see fully; and the Spirit works in us, helping us in our weakness, assisting us in our prayers, interceding in us with sighs too deep for words, drawing us in prayer into the very heart and love and mission of God. According to the Epistle, it is the work of the Spirit to open up before us the entire future of the universe, and to draw us into being God's missionaries to make that future real.

And I think it is just a bit of that missionary-toward-the-future role that we see in the reading from Acts today. The Holy Spirit draws the apostles into the potentiality to speak other languages, so that they may share the praise of God and the Good News about Jesus with people far beyond their own circle, far beyond their own comfort zone. The bystanders at first think it's just drunken gibberish; but Peter correctly identifies it as a gift of prophecy, as an enactment of God's promise to pour out the Spirit on everyone, absolutely *everyone*—sons and daughters will prophesy, Peter quotes, young people will see visions and old people will dream dreams, even slaves will receive the Spirit—and in a society as highly class-conscious as Peter's society, that promise of the Spirit even for slaves was radical Good News indeed. Peter understands that the gift of languages is part of the Spirit's work to create communication, part of the Spirit's work to create *communion*, between all sorts and conditions of people, and that communion creates the space in which justice and peace and love can grow and flourish. According to Acts, the gift of languages on the first Christian Pentecost was the Spirit's work to open up new possibilities for communion, so as to draw all people into God's mission to grow the New Creation.

And so that leaves us with a question, on this Feast of the Pentecost: Where is the Spirit drawing us now? If the Spirit draws us into participating in the mission of God, if the Spirit draws us into the opening of God's future, then where in particular is the Spirit drawing us *now*?

I think one of the places the Spirit could be drawing us is into a greater sense that every one of us, every member of Trinity, has each our own particular role to play in God's mission. I think the Spirit could be opening up before us a deeper understanding that the mission of God is not something that is reserved only for ordained people or designated people or people who go overseas to do Gospel work in foreign lands. The mission of God comprises each and every thing each and every one of us does to build up justice and peace and love in God's world. Remember that in the story from Acts today, every single one of those hundred-and-twenty persons who had come together on Pentecost was filled with the Spirit and began speaking about God's deeds of power in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability. To be sure, when the crowd questioned, Peter began to speak as the leader on behalf of them all. But every single one of them had inspiration and creativity and leadership in the Spirit—it wasn't just Peter, but *all* of them who were inspired. I think that's how we at Trinity are called to be, too: we have our elected and acknowledged leaders, to be sure; we have programs and mission trips and ministries sponsored and organized by the church as a whole, of course; but every single one of us is gifted with inspiration and creativity and leadership to do God's work and further God's mission in our own day-to-day lives, in our families and workplaces and schools and communities, in church and out of church, in sacred space and in secular space, in every place the Spirit opens up before us and draws us to go. We are all God's missionaries; and it is the parish's job to give each one of us the tools and the support and the prayer and the companionship we need to discern where the Spirit is drawing us, and to help us get up and go there.

So on behalf of the parish let me ask: Where is the Spirit drawing *you*? Is there some part of your life where the energy seems to be up, where your passions seem to be engaged, where it feels to you like there is something new drawing you to be active and involved and enthusiastic and excited? Is there something you feel needs to be done, and there is energy in you to do it? Can you discern that as the Holy Spirit, filling you, and surrounding you, and opening up the space to draw you deeper into God? And how can Trinity Church be of help to you to respond to the Spirit's draw?

“Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting, and all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.” May the Holy Spirit fill us today, and draw us together into the glory and the mission of God. Amen.