

“Growth When the Spirit Blows”

May 31st, 2020
Covid 11

Laura Tobin
Wall Street United Virtual Church

Scripture: Acts 2:1-12 NRSV. The Coming of the Holy Spirit

When the day of Pentecost had come, they 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. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, 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—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

On Monday of this week our Office Manager, Cathie called me and asked if I would be willing to cover for Pastor Kim as she is off on emergency compassionate leave to help in the failing health of her father. Being someone who likes to help where I can, I quickly said yes, even though I had no ideas brewing in my mind. But as the week unfolded and I sat quietly on the deck doing my quiet times; this is what I believe God has put on my heart for this Pentecost Sunday.

Take a look at this image – some of you will recognize it as a crab apple tree. Less than 2 months ago it was a bare tree showing minimal signs of hope. Then a couple weeks back, the foliage began to appear, and the green leaves shot forth. My son commented around that time that he was looking forward to the pink blossoms appearing soon on the apple tree. Well, sure enough, it did not take long for the blossoms to appear, and oh the brilliant pink and white that burst forth.

Sadly they did not last very long, and this week as I sat on the deck and watched the tree up close, the wind began to blow and the blossoms,

blew away. As quickly as they begun to appear, they began to disappear; being blown across my porch, across the lawn and onto my neighbour's pool deck.

I was truly captivated by the blossoms and their blowing in the wind. The beauty was being destroyed so to speak. But then I remembered, with the blowing of the wind will come greater growth as the fruit begins to develop.

ends, I share this story, because I think it points to this week's scripture passage. Scripture tells us that in this story we have a group of disciples who were instructed to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit after Christ ascended to the Father. While all around them the annual festival of Pentecost, not unlike our Thanksgiving, was being celebrated. Penta meaning 50, indicates that this celebration was happening 50 days after the resurrection of Christ. So although there were celebrations happening, you can only imagine that there are still many murmuring and whispering about what happened here last month; when the Messiah was crucified and resurrected. We have to remember though it wasn't just the disciples of Jesus who were in town; but many people from across the Roman empire had gathered for the festival. Here we have it, lots of people in a crowded space – the perfect setting for the spread of something something bad or something good?

Let's get back to the disciples - I want to highlight that there were more than just the 11 from the upper room story. In one of my readings it was suggested there were 120 disciples who were gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost. Of those 120 some were the same disciples on whom the breath, the Spirit of Jesus, had been breathed into - only weeks earlier when the Risen Jesus had come to them as they gathered in that Upper room; scared and hiding behind locked doors.

At that time Jesus commissioned them to face the world with boldness, to go into the world as he had been sent to the world. But remember, before he left them in that locked room, he breathed the Holy Spirit into them, giving them strength and confidence to do as he had asked.

From there as the days passed; the disciples were out and about doing as Jesus commanded; and Jesus was proving to many that he had been raised from the dead. Jesus was hanging out with and equipping his disciples for when the day finally came for Jesus's ascension into heaven; to be reunited with the Father. But before he left, he instructed told them all to stay in Jerusalem and wait for the Holy Spirit that he was going to be send.

Now, only a week later the disciples are gathered with other followers, waiting together, not just there to party and celebrate, but rather to *strategize* their next big move when the time was right. Like any good coach and team they were preparing, pausing, and praying for what would come next as the Holy Spirit would come to them.

When all of a sudden, a strong wind and loud noise blew through the room where the disciples were gathered. And boy, did it cause a stir! There is no BBC, CBC or Roman Broadcast Corporation to go back to and get the full details; but the story goes that the Spirit fell on them as flames of fire, each of them being able to communicate in a language understood by all others who were gathered in Jerusalem.

There was such commotion going on that those who were around the building could hear these Galileans, these disciples speaking languages that were not their own but yet that they could understand. I have no idea what the people were hearing the disciples/the Spirit say, but I want to believe it was something like Love Wins. I love you with an everlasting love. I died for you!

Please recall those cities that were mentioned in this morning's reading, all part of the Roman empire: Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs –

These were not particularly Jewish friendly places. And Jerusalem itself is the place where Jesus's crucifixion had recently happened so it was not very welcoming either. Yet, these were the people and the places the disciples were called to minister to first, and to build the first Christ centred communities.

Friends as much as I have loved my porch and watching the apple blossoms blow to and fro, I have even more strongly been moved by the events in the news this week. Hearing of the senseless, needless death of George Floyd and other racist activities this week has moved me to tears of anger. I become frustrated as I read headlines that talk about marginalized at risk people being treated poorly. I have cringed as my LGBTQ friends feel a need to gather together and feel safe in their own virtual space this weekend.

Christ called his followers to start their witness and to spread the gospel to the world in the places of greatest hostility and intimidation.

Friends, as disciples of Christ, we are called to take the Gospel and Love of Christ into some pretty dark, messy, tough places. In my study

Bible is says "In reaching Judea with the gospel, the Galilean apostles would have to surmount barriers of regional pride and cultural arrogance. But in moving into Samaria they would have to overcome long held ethnic prejudices. Sadly, we do not have to look hard to see that things are not much different today.

Friends, in our place of privilege it is not enough to say I am not racist, in our wealth it is not enough to say good luck, in our haste it is not enough to say maybe later. May we be filled with the Spirit as we take the gospel, the language of love, The Good news of Jesus to ALL who need to hear it and see it in their own language.

But we are not called into these places alone, just like the Spirit came on the disciples on the day of Pentecost, so the Holy Spirit remains with us today. Sometimes dropping a lightening bolt to get our attention, other times, giving us a gentle morning nudge.

My friends, I want you to picture with me – yourself a child of God, called to be Christ's disciples. That calling will not look the same for all of us. But we all need something, from the Holy Spirit.

What do you need the Holy Spirit to do for you? Do you need strength? Do you need peace? Do you need comfort? Do you need forgiveness? Do you need to see the face of Jesus in another?

Friends like the tree in my back yard, that grows in and out of season, yet produces the best fruit when the wind blows and the fruit is formed - - May the Spirit of God blow in your life to carry the seeds of love into the places of darkness and brokenness so that hope and good fruit can be found!

Peace!