

June 4, 2017

**Pentecost: Now and Again**  
*Acts 2:1-20, I Corinthians 12: 3b-13, John 20:19-23*

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We gather here as followers of Christ, to worship our God, and learn to follow more closely  
Today we continue our focus on intentionally pursuing discipleship.

In our culture and circumstances today it is not easy to live out our faith.

When the popular view of religious is negative

Amid the choices, the myriad of calls on our time,

And amid the realities of everyday life, when bad things happen to good people,

And we are not always sure how to articulate what we believe or sure what we believe.

The truth is that living faith has never been easy, discipleship is not easy.

Thank God we don't have to do it alone!

God accompanies us through the presence of the Spirit and provides us with the community of faith

Pentecost gives us a better understanding of the Spirit, discipleship, and faith community.

God's Spirit came not in just one way, but in many,

Today we encounter three stories of how people experienced the Spirit in their lives

Luke tells of the Spirit coming with sound and light effects,

Immediately empowering disciples to do new things, follow God in new ways.

John tells us of how the Spirit came as a sigh, when Jesus breathed on his disciples

With that same breath he stressed the role of forgiveness in the life of following his way.

In Corinth, Paul stressed how the Spirit empowers believers with Spiritual gifts,

That become obvious as they are used for the good of the whole community of faith,

As the Spirit continues to make all one body, ALL One in the Spirit.

I confess, at some times in my life, I have wished for the dramatic moment, have you?

But I have not heard the rush of the Spirit and seen tongues of fire move in a congregation

or spoken English to have Spanish or Russian come out, Can you imagine that happening right now?

The chaos, the noise? The babbling, the surprise of it all.

It sounds rather un-Presbyterian I fear...but the Spirit often is pictured as moving in ways that challenge groups of believers (like us) and moves disciples out of their established comfort zones.

With the coming of the Spirit the Christian church was born.

But the Spirit didn't just come once, the Spirit of God continued to be poured out throughout time

Jesus closest friends and disciples, were ordinary people, called to cooperate in Christ's mission

As followers, they sometimes got it right and sometimes missed the point entirely

They continually encountered change, were pushed to change themselves.

After the crucifixion they had to deal with monumental changes

they had lost their friend and leader,

All they had worked for with Jesus seemed to be destroyed, their dreams trampled,

They scattered, some to return to their previous occupations,

Afraid for their lives, when they got together it was behind locked doors,

Confused by the way things had changed, all they learned about discipleship seemed irrelevant

At first the Risen Christ joined them from time to time,

But after he ascended his appearances would stop,

Again they had to learn a new way of discipleship,

for this he told them they would need help, so they should wait for the Comforter to come.  
So it was that this group were gathered, with belief needing help in their unbelief,  
Afraid for their lives, confused about their discipleship, unable to see a way forward,  
Separated from outsiders by a locked door,  
Unaware of God's spirit hovering over them as God's Spirit hovered over the deep before  
creation  
And then God's breath was breathed into them,  
Just as God blew life into the first person, God breathed life and purpose into them.  
And the disciples saw that they were not to be imprisoned by their fears and doubts,  
That they were to continue what they once started, not in exactly the same way,  
But they were to build on what they had learned, to show God in ways that others might believe  
As they burst from the room, they were given tools to include others, to form communities  
Gifts to share, instructions to forgive, new words to speak, and promote understanding.  
The Spirit to comfort, guide, teach, and help them navigate change and challenge yet to come.  
Together they would learn a new and living way, as the Spirit moved in and around them.  
And so the Christian church was born in the Spirit, and continued in the power of the Spirit,  
The real miracle of Pentecost, or receiving the Spirit is not seen in sound and light drama,  
Is seen in the lives of real people,  
who had argued about who was the greatest and about who was closest to Jesus  
Through those who had disagreed with each other about the meaning of Jesus' teaching  
And those who fell asleep when asked to pray, and the ones who abandon and denied him  
The miracle is that the Holy Spirit revived a room full of well intentioned bumbleres,  
Transforming them, to show the world through forgiveness and love,  
in how they treated each other, to built lives on trusting God.  
The new church was known for how outsiders were accepted and integrated not for who was  
kept out,  
It grew not by keeping things the same but by changing to adapt to new situations and conditions  
as the Spirit led them.  
Pentecost happened then and continues to happen now, and will happen again,  
As God's Spirit breathes new life, encourages, challenges and transforms ordinary people like us.  
We depend on that Spirit to be disciples of Christ today, to be church today.  
The truth is we are more like those well intentioned bumbleres that we like to admit  
At times like the first disciples we are confused by what is happening around us,  
Not by violent people outside our doors, but by declining attendance in church,  
But the way that others follow God,  
We are reluctant to change, not ready to burst from our locked room  
Nor reluctant to move out of our comfort zones,  
Even so, God's unpredictable Spirit is present with us today enabling us to be disciples!  
We see evidence of the Spirit, not in sound and light drama  
But as fear of change embraces new and living ways of following Christ,  
As we move from keeping things the way that are most comfortable,  
To changing in response to new cultures, new conditions, new ways God is working,  
We see the Spirit as not only is the world transformed, but believers, you and I, are transformed,  
Changed into who God intends us to be.  
Like the early church, we are called to a life of change, challenged to be aware of the Spirit  
leading,

All of our experiences, our past faith, what we have learned, are to be built on in the Spirit's power

So that we can witness to God's love and grace in a way that makes sense in today's conditions.

As the Spirit breathes into us and through us, we are given what we need to live out our faith.

The Spirit comes in different ways, providing what is needed to show God's love and grace,

We are given clues to help us recognize the Spirit moving around us,

It looks like believers seek help for their unbelief rather than impressing others with extreme devotion

It sounds like words of encouragement, words that bring love and life, rather than divisive words

It looks like outsiders being embraced and included, and room being made for young and old

We see the Spirit sweeping through us

As gifts are shared for the good of all, the Spirit of God is breathing

As people like you breathe in and then speak to share God's love with others

or offer forgiveness for what seemed unforgivable,

Or as you reaching out to someone that you had meant to walk away from,

Or as you work toward unity rather than contributing to divisions,

As the Spirit moves, communities also show the reality of God's presence in their lives.

It looks like communities reaching out to do justice,

not believing they God to others, but helping others to see God is already with them.

As the early disciples discovered; in bursting from their safe place, in taking risks,

In inviting and fully accepting others, in changing and being responsive to changing conditions,

Over 3,000 not just believed but were added, included, cared for, in one day!

It could happen again....Are we ready for God's Spirit to change US so it can happen today?