

## Sermon - Pentecost Sunday

Asperges Story from Mackenzie's Baptism: People ducked out of the way to avoid getting wet.

Today is Pentecost, the joyous celebration of God's gift of the Spirit to the church. *The great 50 days of Easter culminate today in the Pentecostal festival of fire, wind and spirit.* The sadness of Jesus' departure is overcome by the joy-filled presence of the Holy Spirit. While we recognize that this was a special event for the Christian community, we must remember that the idea of Spirit was not new - and would have been a reality of faith to the early Church. Remember, God had given the Spirit to people in times past. The Holy Spirit was present at Creation; Through David, the Spirit spoke; in Isaiah the Spirit was present with the people; the Spirit of God was present leading Ezekiel. The disciples' experience of the Spirit at Pentecost was as a fulfillment of a promise (covenant) made by Jesus during that long discourse at the Last Supper. "The advocate will come - the Spirit who reveals the truth about God." (John 15:26a)

Our Acts reading presents us with the story of Jesus' disciples gathered in Jerusalem with Jews from all over the known world. They were gathered for the festival called Shavuot - the "Feast of Weeks" - a celebration of the spring harvest.

It was 50 days after the Passover and therefore called Pentecost (pente - 50 in Greek.) In strong metaphoric language, the author of Acts, tries to share with us the wonderful events of that day. Pictures of a powerful wind, tongues of fire, and strange utterances suggest a deeply dramatic experience for those who had gathered. Wind and fire are symbols used in the Hebrew Scriptures for the presence of God. *(And we must realize that they are similes - like the rush of wind, tongues as of fire.)* And as in the vision quoted from the book of Joel, everyone was present, women, men, children, youth and seniors, of all nationalities. What an amazing picture is prepared for us! In this earliest sermon by Peter, the church is represented as being for all humanity. All the barriers of race, language, nationality, age, physical capabilities and gender are disregarded by the power of God. And the result: formerly fearful and powerless people are strengthened and sent out boldly into the world.

The Holy Spirit comes to God's people in a myriad of ways and in scripture today, the Spirit comes in loud and powerful ways (and sometimes destructive ways - wind and fire together are usually a recipe for disaster! But what comes after, the new growth can be quite beautiful -

forest fire on the highway left a wonderful blueberry patch [not saying always - don't hear what I'm not saying- but sometimes can be left with a great glory].

So, I've been thinking, when God's Spirit falls on us (and if we are to believe the Acts reading, it will because it descended upon all people), do we duck out of the way much like the Asperges? Much like falling flankers (embers or sparks) at a campfire? Do we duck out of fear of being burned? Or getting a little wet? It's as if, if God's Spirit doesn't land on me, then I do not have a responsibility to God or God's people or God's Kingdom. Bad news for you. The Holy Spirit came to you at either your baptism or at the time you accepted or started questioning This Divine One into your life. And then, for some of us, we were reminded of that indwelling at our Confirmation. We've already been marked by the cascading embers. Made wet by the water. We've been blessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

So, what shall we do with this gift? With the ember we hold? The Gospel reading tells us we are to go and testify - we are to speak the truth about the God we believe in. To spread the fire to all the world. To be honest in who we are as a people of God. How simple. A quote often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi is: "preach the gospel at all times - use words if necessary." We speak the truth about God through how we live our lives.

Late in his career, when the Yankees were comfortably ahead in the pennant race, Joe DiMaggio was asked why he continued to play so hard. He said, "Because there might be somebody out there who's never seen me play."

We should live every day as if someone will see us who has never seen the Creator before.

My Friends, may we feel the fire of God burning within us and may we feel so moved to breath God's wind into all the world. Amen.