

Pentecost A
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church
Lakeland, FL
May 28, 2023

I Cor 12:3b-13
Psalm 104
Acts 2:5-21
Jn 7:37-39

Please pray with me -- Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit instructs the hearts of the faithful, grant that by that same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever rejoice in her consolations.

Water. I remember the day several years ago – a hot summer day that Earl and I moved without the benefit of a moving company. It was just across town and a gaggle of friends chipped in to lend a hand. Oh, it was hot. And by lunch time I was parched. And someone offered a cool glass of water. Ahhh...

You know the feeling, right? After a time of working in the garden or in the garage or workshop. Or at the end of a race or sporting event. Or simply on a warm summer day, a glass of water with just the right number of ice cubes and that perfect squeeze of lemon.

Water comes to us, of course, from the rains, from snow and sleet and hail. Water comes to us from the depths of the earth in springs and aquifers. Water flows over the earth in seas and oceans and lakes and ponds and creeks and rivers. Water flows.

The way that water flows in any given area – water from rainfall, run-off, springs and rivers and the like – is affected by the contours of that land. And where there is a ridge or high point in elevation, the water will run one way or the other as a result of that ridge. That is called a watershed. It changes what is regular and unobstructed into something very different. A watershed changes things.

The notion of a watershed has come into our ordinary speech. We speak of “watershed” moments or “watershed” events. I found a website that listed several of them – watershed events in our human history. Among them were the development of the printing press. The discovery of the small pox vaccine. The terrible occurrence of the black plague. Even included in this list was the posting of the 95 Theses by Luther. And Jesus’ birth was number one included on the list.

What might you have included in a list of watershed moments? Perhaps 9-11? The development of the atomic bombs? The destruction of the Berlin Wall? The Arab Spring? The discovery of penicillin? And, of course, the covid pandemic. We can see that each of these changed the course of life as it was commonly known. Each of these were watersheds in one way or another. Water flowed in new ways and things changed.

And today, Pentecost, we celebrate dramatic changes that occurred nearly 2000 years ago. Pentecost – a watershed time. Tradition tells us that 40 days after Jesus’ resurrection he was taken up into the heavens. And only several days after that, his disciples were gathered together again in Jerusalem for a major Jewish festival and Jews from all over were there. Nothing particularly surprising or unusual... yet.

And then as the disciples were gathered together in one place, things changed drastically. There was a rush of wind that filled the entire house. Then tongues like fire came upon them and rested upon each one there and they began to speak as the Holy Spirit gave them ability. And all of those who heard them could understand them in their own languages – not because of their skilled linguistic ability but because of the work of the Holy Spirit.

And then Peter rose to the occasion and began to proclaim what they had seen and witnessed about Jesus. And the world was never again the same. Watershed.

When else has the Spirit, the life-giving Holy Spirit shown up?

At creation when all was chaos, the Spirit moved over the water. When God fashioned human beings from the dry dust of the earth, breath – Spirit – wind was breathed into us and we became alive. Watershed.

In that vision of the valley full of dry bones, God breathed breath into all that was dead and it became alive – indeed a vast multitude. Watershed.

That day on the Jordan River, when Jesus walked up to his cousin John for baptism and the heavens were torn open and the Holy Spirit like a dove descended on Jesus as God spoke words of affirmation – You are my Son with whom I am well-pleased. Watershed.

Among those who were wondering what on earth could be next as they sat in that room together, minus Jesus, the Spirit came like tongues of fire. Watershed.

No, the comings of the Spirit that we consider in our readings today are not the quiet comforting times that we often equate with the Holy Spirit, the comforter, the paraclete. Those quiet times that I pray we have each experienced in times of deep gratitude, amazing awe, profound grief. The Holy Spirit always is present with us then. Yet today, the Holy Spirit that we consider is the Spirit who will change things forever, who will renew the face of the earth, who will speak new languages and do new things. Do we dare to pray for this today?

Each of us have been brought into the church of Jesus Christ, not by our own doing, not even by parents or grandparents or godparents. We have been brought into the church through the Holy Spirit, embraced in the arms of God, forgiven, renewed and equipped for the work of God in this time and in this place and in places still unknown – we have been wrapped up into this in the waters of our baptism. And we walk wet.

Sopping in the waters of baptism, we come to this place every Sunday – week upon week, month upon month and year upon year. We come. We come SO THAT we can listen to a new language being spoken, a new thing being done. We come so that we can join into the vast multitude bearing the good news of Jesus here at Grace, in our neighborhood and community and indeed to the ends of the earth. We come so that we can speak a new language. We come so that we can be part of God doing a new thing.

Sounding the Seasons – Pentecost by Malcolm Guite

Amen.