



The Feast of Pentecost 2014

Acts 2:1-21

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. 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?" But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

 In the last days it will be, God declares,
 that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh,
 and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
 and your young men shall see visions,
 and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even upon my slaves, both men and women,
 in those days I will pour out my Spirit;
 and they shall prophesy.

And I will show portents in the heaven above
 and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

The sun shall be turned to darkness
 and the moon to blood,

 before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day.

Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved! "

The first time I ever saw a lupine I was driving along a state road in Maine in early June. There on the side of the road was a bank of rich green leaves out of which came graceful long flowering stalks with purple and white and pink blossoms on them: incidentally the very same flowers I am seeing everywhere in British Columbia at this time of year.

“What is that?” I asked the friend who was driving me along the road in Maine. “Those are lupines,” my friend said. “They’re kind of like potato chips—it’s hard to have just one.”

I did not understand what she meant. What I did understand was that I wanted my own little cluster of those very same plants on my own land—in a small bed in the field that ran down from my house to the water’s edge. And so bright and early the next day I paid a visit to my next door neighbor who had lupines on her land.

“Do you think I could have one of your lupine plants?” I asked her over the tea she had just poured for me.

“Sure,” she said. “But just remember. They’re like potato chips—it’s hard to have just one.”

“Whatever,” I said as I followed her to her tool shed and watched as she dug the plant up, and put it in a plastic bag for me to take home.

So I went right home and planted that lupine in the spot where I hoped to have a cluster of plants some day.

The next summer, in the very same spot where I had planted the one lupine, a number of lupine plants appeared, together growing into the desired little cluster of plants that I had originally hoped for. And so, pleased with myself, I put a little wire fence around them, happy to have accomplished my goal.

But the next year when spring returned, I noticed that something more had happened. Yes, the lupines had come up and were blooming within the little fenced off area I had so carefully created. But there, stretching out and covering the field that ran from the house to the water’s edge were lupines, more lupines, and still more lupines. What had started as a single plant and then, a little carefully controlled and fenced bed, was now an entire field of lupines.

And so I discovered that, yes, lupines are like potato chips, but more than this, I discovered that lupine seeds go where nature takes them and that once the seeds fall, they are very, very vigorous.

In today’s reading from the book of Acts we discover that God’s Holy Spirit is a lot like my lupines: vigorous and unable to be contained.

Recall that our passage for this morning comes right after Luke’s account of Jesus’ ascension into heaven, right after the return of the disciples to Jerusalem and the gathering of those

disciples with a group of women in an enclosed room. Once there, they wait, pray and do organizational work, that is, they cast lots to decide who will replace Judas. It is into this little enclosed space, into this more limited agenda, it is onto this little fenced garden bed, if you will, that the Holy Spirit comes like a rushing, thunderous wind, like flames of fire, dropping down upon them like so many lupine seeds.

The result, of course, is astonishing. For in an uncontrolled way, they begin speaking of God's deeds of power not in one language but loudly and in the languages of many. And it is these utterances in many tongues, in all their power and variety, that burst the walls of the enclosed room, that jump over the little fenced garden bed. For those outside the room can't help but hear what's going on inside, and they just have to find out what's happening. So these outsiders somehow find their way into the space and are completely flummoxed at what they find there. "They must be drunk" they say to each other. "They must be drunk" because these peasant men and women would never know all the languages we hear, languages that belong to people far and wide.

And so it happens. What begins in a little more controlled clump with a smallish agenda, jumps the fence, seeding not just a surrounding field but a great expanse of earth, because, well, the seeding Spirit of God, the news about God's mighty acts cannot stay put, cannot be contained but, in themselves, contain such vigor that they must spread and take root away from the place where they began.

And, of course, it makes sense, doesn't it? For the mighty acts of God are not just stories from long ago and far away. They are stories about the crucified and risen Christ now, active and alive and empowering in our own lives. Stories like these: listen for which story is yours:

- The story of when we, you and I, were down for the count and left for dead and, behold, something or someone led us back into life. And so we cannot help but want to bring life to others.
- The story of when we, you and I, were in prison with the door locked and the key thrown away and, behold, freedom found us. And so we cannot help but want to free others.
- The story of when we, you and I, were isolated and alone, and, behold, community and companionship took us in its embrace. And so we cannot help but want to befriend others.
- The story of when, we, you and I, had no dignity, and, behold, someone or something disclosed the dignity that was ours. And so we cannot help bring dignity to others.

These experiences, these mighty acts of God cannot stay put, cannot stay contained but must take root, grow, bloom, seed and spread out farther and farther.

And the only thing that might hold back the spread of these mighty acts in all their power, the only thing that might hold us back is our own or others' disbelief that these mighty acts could have happened to us at all. "We must have been drunk," we tell ourselves, "to think that we had experienced this life-giving, soul-freeing, isolation-shattering, dignity-conferring

power of God and that we could give voice to it though the Spirit in and for the lives of others. We must have been drunk.”

But we, like Peter, know that this has nothing to do with drunkenness. This is as real as thunderous wind, as the power of fire or as a field of lupines stretching as far as the eye can see, lupines full of vigorous seeds ready to spread.

This, then, is what Pentecost is about: both acknowledging and manifesting the Spirit of God that each of us has already received in Baptism: doing this in whatever field we find ourselves in, doing this in spite of any voice that would discount our experience.

Where is God’s Spirit, a Spirit which is already yours, trying to grow and flower in you as you flourish where you’re planted? What particular word rooted in God’s mighty acts are you being asked to internalize more fully and bring to a world that craves it? Is it a word of life? Is it a word of freedom? Is it a word of community? Is it a word of dignity? And who or what is the voice of disbelief that would deny your ability to be and to do these things?

The Pentecost story of the rushing wind and mysterious tongues of fire that come upon the disciples and the story of the field of lupines stretching from an old farmhouse in Maine clear down to the water’s edge, both of these stories tell us that the Spirit of God cannot be contained, will not be circumscribed by location or fences, will not be dampened or cut short by our or others’ nay-saying. All we need do is to come with open hearts and open hands—the fertile soil of the Spirit of God. Come with open hearts and open hands. Come with open hearts and open hands.