

## **Pentecost Sunday, June 4, 2017**

**Acts 2:1-21; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13; John 7:37-39**

At Pentecost, the Book of Acts says, the followers of Jesus were “all together in one place” when a *Wind of Change* blew through that place and “all of them were filled with the Holy Spirit.” Then, upon receiving this gift of the Spirit, the lives of Jesus’ disciples became.... Well, their lives became more difficult, not less. More complicated, not less. More demanding, not less.

These disciples became the object of ridicule. Some said they were drunk; others, that they were off their rocker. Family members, friends and neighbors from their “old”, more “sober” and “sane” life, did not welcome or rejoice in the “new” life that had suddenly been given to these, now, Spirit-filled followers of Jesus.

Having received into themselves - into their hearts and minds - the gift of the Holy Spirit, the lives of Jesus’ followers became more difficult, complicated and demanding. The Good News for them, and for us – for all yearning, hopeful, would-be-followers of Jesus – the Good News is that their lives also became more..., far more meaningful. Because, in Jesus, God’s own Beloved, they could see now that they had been given their life’s Guiding Star. In Jesus’ life and love, his teaching and healing, his being ridiculed and rejected – crucified and risen – they were given to see anew deep, deep meaning. The Spirit gave them eyes to see the pattern for their own lives in the pattern of Christ’s life – a life of complete and constant self-giving love. This would be the Way that they, however feebly and falteringly, would choose to follow the rest of their lives.

From the moment they experienced that great rush of wind - the Breath of God around, among and within them - even on many days to come when they did not feel this same refreshing breeze assuring them of God’s presence with them,

still, they chose to trust in this gift of the Spirit they'd been given on that Pentecost Day. And, for most of them, on most days, this was enough.

Friends, today I would tell you that this is my story too!

This is the Good News upon which I have chosen, and chose, to stake my life. I do so on days when it's as if I too can feel the Spirit's cool breeze upon my face and burning-fire in my heart; and on those days, many more days and nights, when I feel no breeze at all, when the once bright coals of faith in my heart have grown cold. I choose to trust this Good News of the Spirit's constant love and presence when life and faith come easy; and, even more so, when life and faith become more difficult, complicated and demanding for me. It's then, especially, that I remember and trust (as did Jesus' earliest followers) that my life is more meaningful in God's sight than I can see, or will ever be able to understand. I choose to believe that the gift of the Holy Spirit – whom I cannot see, and does not always feel near to me – is, still, the gift that does inspire and empower me to live (feebly and falteringly, for certain) a life of self-giving love that seeks its “pattern” in the life, death, and ever “new” life of Jesus Christ.

Today, in John's Gospel, we read of how Jesus cried out: “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.”

I don't know about you, but I'm thirsty most days, and every night, for that Living Water offered by Christ. And so I choose to come to God, in prayer, each morning and night. I choose to read the stories of Scripture, and talk about them with others, in the community of faith, each week. I also choose to join with other would-be followers of Jesus in worship every Sunday. And, through the week, however poorly and timidly, I still seek to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God. Most of my attempts – to live by faith a life of self-giving love and service – are pitiful at best. Yet, the very fact that I keep on trying is, I believe,

a sign that God has not abandoned me and God's Spirit is still powerfully present in my life. And, for me, that is enough.

You see, this is the Good News upon which I choose to stake my life. And in doing so I have found my life to be a little more complicated; but, also, far more meaningful than otherwise it would be.

I wonder. Is this your faith also? Is this your Good News too? If not, please know that it can be.

For what it's worth, and for what God does with it, you have had my weak and timid witness over these past 19 years. You've also had, in scripture the witness of those yearning, fearful, hopeful, would-be disciples of Jesus who at Pentecost were all "filled with the Holy Spirit." Their lives did not become any easier. Their fears and doubts were not all erased. Yet, still, from that day forward their lives were more meaningful to them and more useful for God. So that, as they continued to stumble along, guided by the Holy Spirit, their lives also came to resemble more closely the life and witness of Jesus, the One whom they had chosen to follow – the One whom you and I have chosen follow and to stake our lives upon. The power we have, you and I, to make this choice is itself a precious gift of the Holy Spirit. And being able, daily, to make this choice is enough for me. So could it also be enough for you? Yes, it brings its difficulties; but, I am here to tell you that it also brings deep, deep joy.

Today, in First Corinthians, the Apostle Paul reminds us that: "There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;" and that "To each is given the gifts of the Spirit for the common good." (Now there's a phrase we don't hear much anymore! "The common good." What do you say we bring it back? What do you say we make it our *raison d'être*?)

Presbyterian preacher and novelist Fredrick Buechner, compares humanity to a giant spider web. He writes:

[[ If you touch it anywhere, you set the whole thing trembling... As we move around this world and as we act with kindness, perhaps, or with indifference, or with hostility, toward the people we meet, we too are setting the great spider web a-tremble. The life that I touch for good or ill will touch another, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place and time my touch will be felt. Our lives are linked. No man (no woman) is an island. ]]

The Apostle Paul said it this way: “To each is given the gifts of the Spirit for the common good.”

Now, you don't have to believe this. You don't have to live as if it's so. And you don't even have to choose to believe that there is a Spirit; or, that this Spirit does make all of us members of one body. In fact, you can choose to live as if it is not so. People, churches, businesses, governments and countries would seem to make this choice all the time. They choose to live as if the “spider web of the common good” is not our world's reality. And maybe we may even think, secretly, that ignoring this Spirit of interconnectedness will make our own life less difficult, complicated and demanding. This way of seeing things certainly seems, today to be an easier sell than does selling the Gospel's way of life that is guaranteed to be more difficult, complicated and demanding, even as it is also more meaningful and joyful in its care and concern for the common good of all. The Holy Spirit, after all, has been trying to sell on this way of life for some time now.

In his book, “Circles of Hope,” author Bill Crane writes:

[[ When my wife Pat and her friend Alice go to Central

America to work with poor women's groups there, they usually carry with them pencils, cloth, medical supplies and other items that have been donated by friends. As they were leaving for one trip, the porter at the airport looked at their baggage and shook his head. "Where is all this stuff going?" he asked. "It's way over weight." When they explained what it was for, he talked to a friend at the counter and managed to get the luggage through. When they offered him a tip, he refused to take anything. "No." he said. "I've been down there. I know what it's like. Give the money to the children there." The porter had very little schooling; but he had a very highly developed sense of the common good. He knew that we are all part of a world family with terribly impoverished relatives. ]]

Do you remember the scripture Jesus quoted in today's reading from John's Gospel? "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water."

Friends, this is what's at stake in whether or not we choose to trust the Spirit's presence with us, even on days and through nights when we don't always feel God near us. What is really at stake is whether or not we choose to believe that we have received a share of the Spirit's gifts to be used for the common good – even though we may not feel ourselves to be particularly gifted by God. What's at stake is not, merely, whether or not we'll have our own spiritual thirst quenched by God's Spirit (too many of us seem to get stuck, and hung-up there); but, whether or not from our "believer's heart" there will yet flow "rivers of living water" for all!

Yes; it's a more difficult, complicated and demanding life – this life of faith in God, revealed in Jesus Christ, present always in the Holy Spirit. But it is also a more meaningful, joyful and sustaining life – not merely for us, but for the common good of all.

Most days, I do not feel particularly gifted at living this life of faith. I fall down and I fail at it a lot; at least once every day. But still, by God's grace, I continue to choose to live this life of faith - as poorly as I do - because of all this that is at stake.

What about you? How do you choose? Remember, you are choosing not just for your own sake, but for "the common good of all."

If you're wondering how you'll do this, remember, you have been given witnesses that you may follow along this Way. I know that I myself have been guided and gifted along this Way by many others who have gone before me. "All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit." And some of them are you.