

Year C  
The Feast of Pentecost  
Acts 2:1-21  
John 14:8-17, 25-27

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

It's Pentecost! Red vestments and hangings, and joyful music—celebrating the birth of the Church. In the passage from Acts we hear about the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples. Remember last Sunday Jesus promised that, although he was leaving them, God would send the Holy Spirit to them in his place. And in today's gospel, Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit as the Advocate, which will abide with them, and be in them.

However, even though they were expecting the Holy Spirit's arrival, I doubt they were anticipating this sort of event. Remember, they're all sitting inside together, observing the Jewish holiday of Pentecost, and suddenly there is a sound "like the rush of a violent wind"—note there was not wind, it was the sound that a violent wind makes. Actually it was LIKE that sound. Again, we see that language can't entirely explain what the Holy Spirit was, because we don't have language to fully explain the Divine. We use metaphors to compare what we know to what we experience—the sound was LIKE the sound that the wind makes. And when we say that Jesus is the Lamb of God, we don't mean that he is a fuzzy little lamb, we mean that he is a sacrifice.

Then suddenly "divided tongues, as of fire, appeared and a tongue rested on each of them." So it wasn't fire, but it was like fire, with, maybe, individual flame-like things moving through the air. Try to imagine what that would have been like. There's a roaring sound, with flame-like things dancing around the room. Suddenly a flame rests on each disciple. When you see artist's interpretations of this, it's usually a flame over each man's head. Imagine what this would have been like: a roaring sound, with something like fire dancing through the air. Even if you had seen other miracles, as they had, how amazing would this be?

And then they "began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability." This is not the "speaking in tongues" that we hear about, where no one can understand what's being said, this is actual languages being spoken at that time. The narrator is quite specific about which languages are being spoken, thank you Penelope! She had a tongue-twister of a reading. Then the disciples must have gotten up and moved out into a courtyard, or a street at this point, because they begin to draw a crowd—and the disciples are telling *the gospel* to the crowd. Each person hears this good news in their own language, and everyone is "amazed, and perplexed." They can tell that these men are Galileans, probably through some regional dress, and not rich, probably uneducated, yet they're speaking these foreign languages fluently, so that the strangers can understand. In a way this is the opposite of the Tower of Babel story, where God created different languages in order to drive people apart. Here, the Spirit is calling out the story of Jesus in many languages in order to *bring people together*. This

miracle of the Holy Spirit unifies people of different languages and cultures through Jesus Christ.

Some receive this information, and try to understand and appreciate it, but others say, “oh these guys are drunk on cheap wine!” New wine hasn’t been aged for good flavor—it just has the alcohol.

Peter takes offense at the idea that this miracle is chalked up to drunkenness, and explains that NO, indeed, they couldn’t be drunk at 9:00 in the morning! NO—this is a fulfillment of prophecy, and then begins to quote 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.

This Pentecost experience, Paul says, is God’s miraculous pouring out of God’s Spirit upon all flesh. This miracle is the promised gift of God’s abiding presence in us, *in all of us*, in the form of the Holy Spirit.

I saw a powerful movement of the Holy Spirit yesterday at the special convention to elect our next bishop in the Diocese of Virginia. There were more than 450 of us gathered to vote yesterday, both lay and clergy delegates. Macon was with me—she’s our lay delegate. We all worshiped together and prayed together as we discerned which of the candidates would be the best choice. You might know that there has been some anxiety about the slate of people for this election. The search committee that was formed to create the slate was very diverse, and there was high expectation for an equally diverse slate of candidates, as a result. However, when the slate was released, it contained the names of four straight white men. There was a lot of discussion about that, even yesterday morning, but ultimately, it only took two ballots to elect the Rev. Canon Mark Stevenson to be our bishop. He received a majority of both lay and clergy votes on the *second ballot*. Especially considering all of the difference of opinion, and various agendas of more than 450 people, it is a blessing of the Holy Spirit that we were able to agree on a new leader so quickly.

We prayed for unity, and we prayed for guidance—and we received it. The Rev. Canon Stevenson currently works for Bishop Michael Curry, who is the presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church in the US. The Rev. Stevenson serves as the canon to the Presiding Bishop for Ministry Within the Episcopal Church, which means he is the main liaison between Bishop Curry and the house of Bishops, between Bishop Curry and the dioceses, and between Bishop Curry and other governing bodies of The Episcopal Church. The Rev. Stevenson is a man of wide experience, and deep understanding—but something that greatly impressed me was his testimony that a commitment to *following Jesus* was the foundation for everything he did.

I'm excited to have this man coming to lead us. I'm excited, and grateful for the movement of the Holy Spirit NOW, and for what's coming in the future—both in our diocese, and at Christ Church. The Holy Spirit is on the move, my friends. How will it lead you? Watch and listen.

Amen

The Rev. Melanie K. Lewis  
Rector, Christ Church Millwood