

NO ONE CAN CONTROL THE SPIRIT

This Sunday is Pentecost Sunday when we call attention to the coming and the work of the Holy Spirit in our world and in our lives.

The Holy Spirit is like the wind. It blows where it wants to. We can't control it. We don't know where it comes from or where it is going.

This reminds me of sailing. We have a small sailboat. Of course, you always need wind to sail, but you don't want too much or too little. It can be too much like the wind that causes whitecaps on the lakes. On the other hand, if there is no wind you can't get anywhere. But lots of times, it is just perfect and you can just relax as the wind carries you.

Like the wind, the Spirit comes to live in us and to stir up faith in us. We don't see it and we don't know how and when it will work in our lives, but it is promised to be with us.

As recorded in John's Gospel, on Easter evening when Jesus appeared to his disciples, it says, he breathed on them the Holy Spirit. Jesus had promised that when he left his presence with his followers, he would not leave us orphaned but that he would send the Spirit to dwell with us.

According to the book of Acts, on the day of Pentecost, a small crowd gathered in a room on the highest floor of a house in Jerusalem to wait for the coming of the Spirit according to the promise made before Jesus' ascension.

The promise was that the followers of Jesus would be baptized, not with water, but the Holy Spirit. The baptism of the Holy Spirit would give the people power to be witnesses of Jesus, in word or deed, in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

The crowd consisted of about 120 men and women. As the prophet, Joel, had said, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy."

After the Holy Spirit invaded the space, a crowd of thousands began to gather outside. In the crowd were Jews from many different nations including Greeks, Arabs, Romans, Africans, and Asians, just to name a few.

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Each of the people in the crowd could understand the conversation in the upper room in their own language.

The power of the Holy Spirit got the attention of so many people through the rush of a mighty wind. Suddenly, it happened. Wind, like fire, swept through the disciples. Everyone was amazed. A huge crowd gathered around Peter as he preached and said, "God has given us the Holy Spirit."

As we read on in the book of Acts, we see the difference the work of the Spirit makes in the lives of the apostles. "It says awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the Apostles."

"All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need."

The coming of the Holy Spirit caused them to share all that they had with the poor.

It goes on to say in Chapter 4, "Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common." "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet and it was distributed to each as any had need."

The Spirit works among us also to cause us to reach out to all who are in need of any kind. God continues to work in our lives through the power of the Spirit.

God sets out to claim us even before we are old enough to understand it. We don't need to. That claim in baptism is totally a gift to us from God.

As we live and grow up, we can remember that claim that God has made on us.

God doesn't need that mark in order to claim us as God's child. But we need it as a continued reminder when we question whether or not God loves us and claims us. In explaining the work of the Holy Spirit, Martin Luther wrote as recorded in our small catechism for the meaning to the third article about the Holy Spirit,

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“I believe that by my own understanding or strength I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him, but instead the Holy Spirit has called me through the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, made me holy, and kept me in the true faith, just as he calls, gathers, enlightens, and makes holy the whole Christian church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one common, true faith.”

The Holy Spirit is at work in our lives. The Bible also tells us that even when we don't know what to pray for, the Spirit intercedes and prays for us. What a gift that is to think that God is actually praying for us when we don't even know what to pray for.

And just as what happened to those first apostles, the Holy Spirit comes to effect and change our lives. God needs to continually change us.

For example, it made me sick this week to hear of the police murder of a black man in Minneapolis. How long is it going to take for God to change our thinking for white people to realize that the color of our skin has nothing to do with how much God loves and cares for every person, all whom God has created?

The first apostles were so effected by the power of the spirit that it changed their lives forever. We pray that God will continue to work in our lives so that we will finally see that everyone is equal in God's sight.

The question I want to leave with us today is this one, How is the Holy Spirit working in my life and your life today? How is the Holy Spirit working to change what we think about others and what we think about God in our lives?

Like the wind, we can't control the Spirit. Peter is an example. On that day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit came and Peter and all those with him received power and Peter was never the same.

Peter who, at the time of the arrest of Jesus, denied knowing him, now began to preach Christ to any and all who would listen.

May the Holy Spirit empower us in the same way. Amen

(commentary from Debra Mumford)

