

Pentecost C 2016

“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 did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy Your consolations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.”¹

People from everywhere came to Jerusalem for a great celebration. It was the Jewish feast of Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover, and they had come to celebrate the gift of crops and to give thanks for God’s giving of the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai.

“In Palestine the grain harvest lasted seven weeks and was a season of gladness. It began with the harvesting of the barley during the Passover and ended with the harvesting of the wheat at Pentecost, the wheat being the last cereal to ripen.”²

But something radically different from all the other Pentecostal feasts happened on the day when 40 days after Jesus rose from the dead, and ten days after he had ascended to his Father in heaven, everyone there heard the sound of rushing wind and saw tongues of flame on each other’s heads, and heard each other speaking about God’s deeds of power in all different languages and yet each of them understood it in their own mother tongue. They were each filled with the Holy Spirit. They were amazed and perplexed. What was going on? They were being swept up in the Spirit and didn’t know what to make of it.

So Peter helped them connect their spiritual experience of Pentecost to what God was doing in their midst by connecting them to the story in the Bible that pointed to what they were experiencing. He helped them recognize that the God they knew in Scripture was the same God who was filling them with the Holy Spirit right there and then in the present moment.

¹ Cursillo group reunion opening prayer

² <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12012-pentecost>

In our own journey from trying to fix the church to focusing on God, we are invited **to listen: to listen to each other's stories, to listen to Scripture, and to listen to the people on our neighborhood.**

We are invited **to listen to each other's stories** of where we may have seen God at work in the course of our daily experience—to actually start conversations with each other about our experience of the Holy in the midst of our ordinary.

To listen to Scripture—to hear with new ears the stories about what God is doing so that we can be inspired and surprised by a God so interested in us that God wants to transform our lives through loving care—and **to listen to the people on our neighborhood** by asking them to tell their own stories of where they are experiencing hope, new life, enthusiasm and desire for fullness of life and for God's love. It seems counter-intuitive to let go of our concern for the church and to focus solely on God, but no new growth can happen if we only seek to fix what we see as broken. The Holy Spirit gave people the inspiration and courage to speak out and describe to each other God's deeds of power. The Holy Spirit has come upon us so that we can let go anxiety and worry about the church and to instead put our efforts into trusting the power of the Holy Spirit to make all things new. The Holy Spirit rests on each of us, to warm our hearts, enlighten our minds, open our ears. What is God up to? How can we join God in God's mission?

Would we want to experience the power of the Holy Spirit right here and now? The people of God at that first Pentecost were gathered there for a traditional and familiar religious rite—as traditional and familiar as our own celebrations of the Holy Eucharist every Sunday. Did they expect to experience what came next? Did they know that by coming to worship and thank God that they might be overwhelmed with something entirely different, powerful, exhilarating and disorienting?

All we know is that some of them had been instructed to remain in the city until the power from on high had come upon them. These were Jesus' disciples and their companions. They were waiting expectantly for this gift. Their risen Lord had visited them and had promised that the power of God would come upon them. All they had to do was remain in the city. In other words, they were

supposed to remain together and not hurry off to start new projects until they had been directed and empowered by God.

If we desire to live from the grace of the Holy Spirit, we too, must be ready to be exhilarated and disoriented. Part of us wants this powerful gift, and part of us resists it because it means we have to stop being in charge and let God call the shots. We are not sure we can let go of our very good human solutions to the challenge of life. And yet, many of us have already experienced the amazing grace of letting God be in charge. Many of us have recognized that when we have had to give up and let God guide us, we have ended up with something far better than we could have imagined. God's ways are not our ways—they can be mysterious and disorienting, yes, but they are amazing and life-giving and full of unimaginable growth.

So, as we embark on our path of listening—to each other, to Scripture and to the people in our neighborhood, we can pray for the gift of the Holy Spirit and we can pray for the gift of recognizing the Spirit's presence in ourselves and each other. That's what a member of a New Jersey congregation did when she decided to listen to the people in her neighborhood. She took a walk with Irene—someone with whom she had been going to church for four years before she discovered that they lived in the same neighborhood. I will end with her story told in her own words:

As we were walking, "I told Irene how hard it had been for me and my kids moving into this neighborhood. As a single mom with a third and fifth grader, I had felt left out and isolated. When I would go to the kids' soccer games, school concerts, or the lake in the summer, none of the other parents talked to me. I felt I had 'missed my chance' because I had not met them and formed friendships when our kids were in kindergarten. I told Irene how hurt I had been, and still was, because I never felt like I really belonged in the community. As I finished telling my tale, we came to [a] corner and noticed a crowd of people in a driveway. They had a table set up with coffee, juice and donuts; everyone was festively dressed for the 4th [of July] and to watch [a parade]. Irene recognized some of the people and introduced me. In no time, I had met the entire crowd, and Irene shared my story of how I felt so isolated in the community. Several apologized that that had been my experience. I was welcomed into the group, and we ended up spending the next hour celebrating

with the crowd. As we were leaving, I was invited to join them on the [lake's] beach in the evenings to watch the sunset. They said they were there just about every night and would keep an eye out for me. What do you think God was up to in the neighborhood that day?"³

³ Joining God, Remaking the Church, Changing the World, Alan J. Roxburgh, Morehouse publishing, 2015, p. 64