

Denice K. Leslie

Pentecost / Mother's Day

May 11, 2008

Acts 2: 1 – 21

John 7: 37 – 39

Holy Spirit, Come!

“And suddenly 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...and rested on them.

And each was amazed as everyone present heard and understood in each other's language: Parthians and Medes, Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia and Asia; Jews and Cretans and Arabs...

Wind, tongues of flame, foreigners hearing with understanding in each other's language—what is this strangeness? This weird juxtaposition of sights and sounds? Of the primal elements of creation bursting out of bounds? Of the babble of humanity suddenly uniting in a common understanding? What is this that God is doing among us?

The scripture tells us Peter stood up and preached, “Residents of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem...this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel “...God declares:

‘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...Then everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved!’

Just before his death Jesus spoke of the Spirit saying, “Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.” What Jesus did didn't stop with his death because the power of God was in him—a power as great as that which laid the foundations of creation—the same Spirit Wind that swept across the primordial waters of chaos ---before the Word of God spoke creation

into being. This Spirit came from God, was and is of God's own self. This Spirit animated Jesus. When the Jesus' vessel broke, well..... Killing Jesus simply unleashed this power and made it available beyond all time and space for all who believe in his name and who seek to be his body in this world. The old world ended the day Jesus died. It ended and a new world began with the rolling away of a stone and an empty tomb. Angels announced it—two at a time: One to speak the truth and the second, as Jewish law required of authenticate the truth, to witness. The truth of his resurrection.

When the Risen Christ spoke his last and final words to the disciples saying, “*You will receive power from on high and then you will go into all the world and make disciples,*” the two angels appeared again: One to speak the truth: “*Jesus will return,*” and the second angel to authenticate the of the truth.

Today we are those angels. Did you realize that? The word Angel comes from the word ‘evangel’ from which comes our word ‘evangelism.’ It simply means, “to bear a message of good news from God.”

This is the purpose of the Church. The Spirit is the first evangel to us and we the Church are the authenticating second witness of the truth of Jesus. We are empowered by the Spirit to witness to his truth. But what does it mean to be his witnesses? Well,

“¹Did Jesus say, “Go into all the world and discuss the gospel?”

Did Jesus say, “Go into all the world and program the gospel?”

Did Jesus say, “Go into all the world and do committee work for the gospel?”

Did Jesus say, “Go into all the world and conference about the gospel?”

No. What did he say? He told us:

“Go into all the world and preach the gospel.”

“Go into all the world and teach the gospel.”²

¹ & ² Homiletics: The Witness Principle, 4/94

Go into all the world and BE the gospel!

We have spent many years assuming the world we live in is well acquainted with the gospel—and our task is to respect wherever our neighbors decide to go to church, or temple—and today we can add mosque. But you know what? That's no longer true. The vast majority of our neighbors don't go to church or temple or mosque anywhere. Many know Jesus only through religious music stations, a magazine article or TV show here and there but they are not apart of him. You can't know Jesus unless you are a part of him—a part of his body.

You see the purpose of the Spirit's coming is to call us, his community, into being—to assemble us into HIM: we are his Body alive in the world today.

Unfortunately, the rampant individualism of our culture has seeped into the church so that today we are mostly a collection of individuals who come to do our private devotions, pick and chose if and how we will participate and go home again. Every body of believers needs a direction and a purpose and a common experience of the depth of faith: Every body that claims to be Christ needs to pray together more than administrate together, study together, more than program together, serve together more than survive together.

We don't see ourselves as a piece of the vine, apart from whom there is no sap of sustenance, no growing direction, no purpose, no fruit—no life.

“But to become the body of Christ takes more than a free Sunday morning, a little enthusiasm and a big sanctuary.

It's easy to spot the absence of the Holy Spirit. We've all sat through some church services where it feels as if the Spirit's been sucked right out the doors. We've all attended some church meetings where everyone's individual agenda is so important that the mission of the church is forgotten or an after thought—an “O Yeah, *how does what we are*

doing accomplish the gospel?” As a consequence, we don't really know—and so its just easier to go on with things as usual rather than do the hard work of asking and digging into scripture and testing our motions against Jesus' teachings and actions—figuring it out—and seeking the Spirit's power in prayer.

The Church without the Holy Spirit is just another human social institution—not bad—but not saving—not powerful—not life transforming!

“When we try to go off on our own power, our own strengths, our own spirit—we are bound to fail. We cannot present an authentic witness to Jesus Christ without the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

Remember: The Holy Spirit does not dwell within us so much as *among us*. The church is a community of faith, a communion of witnesses, a collective of love.

Alone we are incapable of being vital witnesses to God's redeeming activity through Jesus Christ. But with the Spirit in our midst, we can do the impossible.

Alone, Abraham could not see beyond the boundaries of one small valley. With the Spirit he could envision the promise of a whole people in a whole new land.

Alone, Moses was confined to chasing his herds in the wilderness. With the Spirit speaking to him in the burning bush he led all the Hebrews to freedom.

Alone, David could not imagine being other than a simple shepherd. With the Spirit he became the king of all Israel.

Alone, John the Baptist was an outcast and a misfit. With the Spirit he was a prophet and a visionary.

Alone, Mary was insignificant and lowly. With the Spirit she was the bearer of the greatest gift God has ever given.

Alone, Peter hid in the high priest's courtyard. With the Spirit he had the courage he needed to stand in the temple and preach.

Alone, Paul was filled with pride and rage. With the Spirit he was transformed on the Damascus Road and filled with love and peace.

St. Lawrence was martyred in 258 A.D. But we remember him, not for his martyrdom, but for his being Archdeacon of Rome.

While he was Archdeacon, the Governor of Rome took Pope Sextus captive and demanded, "Where is the treasure of the church?" The Pope would not tell, and they tortured him to death. Then they took Lawrence captive.

"Where is the treasure of the Church?" they demanded, threatening him with the same fate that befell the Pope.

Lawrence replied, "Governor, I cannot get it for you instantaneously; but if you give me three days, I will give you the treasure."

The Governor agreed. Lawrence left. Three days later he walked into the Governor's courtyard followed by a great flood of people. The Governor walked out onto his balcony and said, "Where is the treasure of your church?"

Lawrence stepped forward, and pointed to the crowd that accompanied him they included: --the lame, the blind, the deaf, the nobodies of society—and said, "*Here are the treasures of the Christian church.*"

Yes, an old world is coming to an end and will continue to die as the new world, the new order of Creation is created, and recreated generation by generation: rebirthing the Church for a new time—renewing the face of the earth!

For this is who God is. As scripture reveals to us, God's name from God's own lips is "*I Am! I Am the One Who is Creating, the One Who Brings into Being!*"

This is another strangeness—a weirdness, a curious thing: That the God of the universe who is and was and always will be, unchangeable and steadfast; God of God, beyond time and existence—is also One who is about creating, recreating and bringing about a new world, a new Church, a new way of being in the world.

A new paradigm! Where the new is ignited even as the old is extinguished--where we are ignited anew even as our old understanding is passing away!

God is about reordering our world after God's vision for creation. And in Jesus invites us to be a part of re-ordering and transforming our world. Indeed, God longs for us to be a part of it and sends the Holy Spirit to help us be a part of it.

Much to our chagrin, just about the time we think we have pretty much tamed the Flame-made God over into our personal image, our national image, our denominational image---

--the Flame bursts out in new ways, the Spirit Wind blows away from our grasp, and over us and around us, sweeping us back into God's paths for what it means to make and keep human life human.

Baptizing us afresh with power to be about Jesus' mission, Jesus' ministry. To be and to make Jesus' disciples: So that, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord might be saved!

Let the people say, "Holy Spirit, Come!"