

Sermon for 28 May 2023 @ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore

Pentecost Sunday

Scriptures: Acts2:1-21; Psalter (*Insert*) Psalm104:24-34, 35b; I Corinthians12:3b-13; John7:37-39

**“What is it?”**

What is this spirit that we keep talking about...calling it the “Holy Spirit” and saying it was the sign of God’s presence in the days after Jesus’ death, and the assurance of his resurrection, and then the evidence of the movement we now call “the Church?”

In the Old Testament, God’s spirit comes among the people of Israel @ various times, works through Moses and the prophets, speaks in the silence after the storm to Elijah, and on and on... In today’s lesson, in Acts, the Spirit enabled Jews gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate fifty days since Passover to understand one another, even though they spoke many native languages. People watching said these folks must be drunk ... and then the Apostle Peter stood up and said, “No! This is the Spirit of Jesus that he promised would come to us...” And it went on to become a dramatic reversal of the Tower of Babel incident in the Old Testament, showing God was bringing folks together in the Jesus movement, in a dramatic reversal of God’s fear that humankind would make it into heaven with their tower, so that God made them each speak a different language and ended the project.

It's one of those teaching events the Church uses to explain and demonstrate love and fellowship, world-wide and constant, as our very basis for living.

The other side of the matter, though, it has seemed to me this particular year, when we are so impressed and depressed with people’s NOT coming together and not agreeing with one another, in politics, in mask-wearing against viral pandemic, and down into the most personal issues of birth control and sexual identity, etc., etc., that we have to ask what is it that does the opposite of bringing people together ... or even more than just emphasizing differences, that this whole idea of crowd enthusiasm has negatively, as under Hitler, and in Putin’s dark organizing energy in the invasion of the Ukraine...

What is at work among humans that makes us both so beautiful and so awful en masse?

As we come to the end of the Great Fifty Days of Easter, when we concentrate on CELEBRATION of our world through our life in Christ, it seems right to think about “group think,” as well as to share thoughts about individual conviction and commitment, more than we ever have so far, as a human race. We watch this kind of thing in animals... My Dad used to speak of how horses were very social animals, and I remember occasional nights when we’d wake up to the sound of his four Tennessee walking horses, led by the spirited mare we called “Lady,” galloping past our country home into the night. They’d broken through the fence ... and we were sure it was Lady’s idea ... and we’d have to get up and dress and drive into the night to where we could corral them and get them back to our barn, feed them fresh alfalfa, and keep them in the lot until we could get the break in the fence repaired the next day. How many illustrations can we think of: Packs of dogs, movies of buffaloes, herds of thundering elephants ...

Spirit, in other words, is a life-affirming phenomenon all through our history; and in deeply personal truth, spirit does great things ... and like any gift in life as we know it, spirit can be dark and abusive as well.

To sum up, then, we face today, and make today an example of every day. God interacts with us, and we live individually, and also in union with others. God's gift of insight, and God's movement within our own souls and bodies, we call spiritual.

We're not fully alive unless we live spiritually. Nothing's really right unless it's founded on Spirit, and nobody's really connected until they're connected through the Spirit.

Don't you all agree?

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, help us to glean from this time worshiping together today new ways to blossom in the Spirit. Convince us how dangerous spiritual misjudgment is. Show us how to get close to true personhood, closer and closer, as we pray, and stand up for justice not just for ourselves but for the rest of the world. It's so marvelous when we grow in the Spirit of Christ! Nothing compares with life in the Spirit; and nothing is more terrible than turning away from the Spirit of Love in you, Lord Jesus, and in you, God of all... Bring us together, and guide us to bring others into the one circle of love that we feel and trust in Jesus. Amen.