

Pentecost Sunday  
Acts 2:1-21, Psalm 104, John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15  
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If Easter is about Jesus coming back to life after his death, Pentecost is about Jesus' disciples coming back to life after they are scared to death. If Easter was the "season of the resurrected Jesus," Pentecost is the "season of the Holy Spirit and resurrected disciples."

Pentecost is sometimes called the birthday of the church. (After the 10:30 service, we are going to have cake and lemonade.) With Jesus now ascended to heaven, the Holy Spirit can come down upon the disciples, and they can continue to do the work of Jesus. We are still carrying out or carrying on that work which began with 12 men and some women nearly 2,000 years ago.

I said last week that our denomination recognizes seven festival or feast days throughout the year, but clearly the big three are Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. Of the three, Pentecost is the least celebrated, but by no means the least important. It may be least celebrated because there is no secular, commercial figure attached to it like Santa or the Easter bunny.

Pentecost is the quieter, less observed holy day, and yet, as we heard in the Acts of the Apostles, on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit arrived loudly and with considerable fanfare. We're told the Spirit entered the room with the sound of hurricane winds, and the disciples' heads were on fire. Wind and fire are usually a very bad combination, but this day we might say God ordered a "controlled burn." Remember, John the Baptist said that while he only baptized with water, the one who was to come, Jesus, would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

But this was still just the beginning as the disciples in their ecstatic state of euphoria rushed out into the street exclaiming the mighty deeds of God in languages they normally couldn't speak or understand. This drew a crowd wondering what all the commotion was and how these fishermen and farmers from Galilee could suddenly be bilingual.

If we were to keep reading in Acts, we would discover that, after a rather lengthy address by Peter to the gathered multitude, 3,000 step forward for baptism. (We will baptize one spirited 5 year-old at 10:30 today.)

Perhaps the Holy Spirit should loose our tongues as well to speak freely, but not obnoxiously, about how God has changed our lives for the better. The Holy Spirit wants to set us free from the confines of self-consciousness, self-absorption and inconsequential lives.

Somehow the Day of Pentecost always reminds me of the 1985 movie “Cocoon.” Three old men are living out their final, uneventful, shuffleboard days at a typical retirement community in St. Petersburg, Florida, called “Sunny Shores.” One day they trespass to discover a nearby vacant home with an indoor swimming pool. Unbeknownst to them, the pool is being used by space aliens to rejuvenate companions left behind on a previous intergalactic expedition. The pool’s waters are filled with the “otherworldly” presence of extra-terrestrials.

The mysterious waters turn out to be a veritable fountain of youth, which the men return to day after day. The once sedate retirees experience a metamorphosis as stiff joints become supple and arthritis and cancer disappear. Before long they are doing double back flips off the diving board and escorting their wives from night club to night club, partying and dancing till the wee hours of the morning.

These men had become new – reborn, we might say, from the infused water. Pentecost is about all of us becoming new. We may be getting older in chronological years, but we should be getting more youthful in the Spirit – more peaceful, fun-loving, wise and caring.

I’ve told this story before, but it is worth hearing again today. The wise and well beloved Mother Superior of a certain convent was dying. The nuns were gathered around her bed trying to do everything they could to make her comfortable. They gave her warm milk to drink, but she refused it. One nun took the cup back to the kitchen and put some whiskey in it – a gift from a previous Christmas.

This time when she held the glass to the weak Mother Superior’s mouth, she sipped it then gulped down the entire glass. The Mother Superior suddenly gathered all her strength and raised herself up in the bed. She had a pious look on her face, and the sisters were ecstatic. “Mother, Mother!” they cried out, “Give us some final words of wisdom before you die!”

Pointing toward the window and the beautiful pasture beyond, the Mother Superior exclaimed, “Don’t sell that cow!”

Today we are reminded that by virtue of our baptisms we are filled with enhanced milk, fortified water, new wine. The Holy Spirit is the church’s life blood if not that of the entire cosmos. In Genesis, the Spirit is present when God creates everything. Adam, the mud man, has the wind or Spirit of life breathed into him before he becomes a living being.

Theologically speaking, Pentecost is the Big Bang event when, as the prophet Joel predicted, God would pour out the Spirit on all flesh. Let us pray daily that the Holy Spirit will gradually or rapidly change our lives so we can become ever more useful to God and God’s world.

Jesus told his disciples before his arrest and execution that it was to their advantage for him to go away and leave them. They didn't understand how this could possibly be true until the Day of Pentecost when they received the same power that Jesus displayed. Let us not shrink from letting the wind and fire of God fill us and this place as well. AMEN.