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St. Peter's, Greenville
20 May 2018
Day of Pentecost, B
Acts 2, Ezekiel

"Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of thy faithful people and enkindle in them the fire of Thy love."¹ These were the words prayed at the beginning of each of my liturgics class in seminary. It's the opening line of a prayer from the 13th century that has traditionally been prayed every Pentecost.

The Christian holiday of Pentecost originates from a Jewish feast that celebrated new life and new crops by offering a gift of first fruits in gratitude and praise. But this holy day has evolved into a day of offering thanks to God for new life in Christ and the gifts of God's Holy Spirit in and among all the people of God.

I love how in our reading from Acts, God supersedes all boundaries of race, ethnicity, nationality, language, social standing, and economic privilege to impose a radical social equality for those who receive the Holy Spirit. When we keep reading through the rest of that chapter, we see "old and young, women and men, [insiders and outsiders ... all receiving] the power of God to prophesy, see visions, and dream dreams.

Occasionally God anoints big dreamers who with their lives and words paint upon a global canvas, renewing visions for the human community (dreamers like Martin Luther King, Jr.)² But it began as a faithful response of a group of ordinary folk to the movement of the Spirit: it seems that the "Galileans" were stereotyped in their day as an ignorant, backwater people.

Perhaps here in SC, we might also be stereotyped as ignorant, backwater folks to some. Yet our voice, if inspired by the Holy Spirit, can be just as impassioned and eloquent when speaking God's truth. God has anointed ordinary believers like you and me before and continues to do so. We also see visions that assist with humanity's task of bringing God's creation to perfection. Visions, for example, such as those that [will be / were] addressed during Christian Formation at 9:30.

All of this is worthy of joyous celebration on this Feast Day of Pentecost.

Thursday morning I was invited to have lunch with the bishop and other clergy in the diocese who have been hired in the last 12 months. And Bishop Waldo spoke briefly about a project he's been working on. His teaser was this: he's been privy to many conversations with individuals who have said that they cannot talk about guns or foreign policy or immigration or anything else political with their significant others because it always leads to a vicious argument. Those who have covenanted to live as one; to wrestle with the hard stuff together; to listen in love to one another ... are now not able to do so. That struck a chord, because I have

¹ First line of *Veni, Sancte Spiritus*

² Adapted from G. Lee Ramsey, Jr.'s Homiletical Perspective essay on Acts 2 in *Feasting On the Word*, Year B, Vol. 3, page 7.

heard some of you say the same thing with regard to these kinds of conversations with your parents or your kids or your closest friends.

But Bishop Waldo's next words got to the heart of the issue: we've somehow forgotten that we are disciples first. And we are people with secular responsibilities second. It's a matter of priorities. Regardless of where we stand on any political issue, we have a moral obligation to treat one another with Christian charity. God does not recognize the boundaries we create around socio-economic status, education attainment, or political affiliation. God spoke to all of God's children the same message of love and the same message of acceptance and the same message of reconciliation – each in a language they could understand. And we are bound – by virtue of our baptism – to do the same. That is the ongoing work of Pentecost: to share the same message of love, acceptance and reconciliation to everyone. That is the mission of the Church given to us on that first post-Resurrection Pentecost. That is the faithful response of thanksgiving to God for new life in Christ and the gifts of God's Holy Spirit in and among the people of God.

We as Christians believe the Scripture still speaks to us in the here and now. We believe that God is continually revealed in new ways through the words of the Old and New Testaments. It speaks to us ... in the present ... about new realities and challenges that we face. Perhaps not with pinpoint specificity, but as a compass for how to navigate the moral challenges and ethical quandaries we encounter each day.

I was halfway through crafting my sermon on Friday morning when I got news of yet another school shooting – one of four school-related shooting this week. And every news channel and internet article was filled with thoughts, prayers, and tears – mine included. And we ordinary people filled the airwaves and social media with either our despair or blame-throwing as to why this is happening and what should or shouldn't be done about it ... and still nothing changes.

When I was new to Christianity, I never understood or could identify with those passages about children suffering for the sins of their parents. I do now. In an era when own arrogance prevents us from engaging in civil discourse and working together to confront the evils we face, when we forget that we are all connected and that we all need each other despite how despicable we might deem another's convictions, when we ignore the reality that we aren't the only ones beloved of God, we are not faithfully responding to God's love for us.

And then ... then the wedding sermon yesterday morning! I hope you heard it. Our Presiding Bishop Michael Curry, another dreamer who is doing the work of renewing visions for the human community on a global canvas, preached Gospel Truth – [“there is power in love. Don't underestimate it.”](#) He said when you experience true love, you know “there is something right about it. And there's a reason for it. The reason has to do with the source. We were made by a power of love, and our lives were meant – and are meant – to be lived in that love. That's why we are here. There's power in love. There's power in love to help and heal when nothing else can. There's power in love to lift up and liberate when nothing else will. There's power in love to show us the way to live. Someone once said that Jesus began the most revolutionary movement in human history: a movement grounded in the unconditional love of God for the world – and a movement mandating people to live that

love, and in so doing to change not only their lives but the very life of the world itself! I'm talking about power. Real power. Power to change the world."³

Man, that guy can preach! I am so grateful for him and for his words. Just an ordinary guy who is receptive to the movement of the Holy Spirit and chooses to share the joy he receives in knowing he's loved.

I think I can speak for most of us that we want to buy in to Ezekiel's vision that we are all connected, fused together by the sinews of the Holy, that hope conquers all despair, and new life is available to this crazy, hot mess of a world. But to live in to that vision, we cannot forget that we are first and foremost beloved Children of God. And so is everyone else, no matter how deeply we may disagree.

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of thy faithful people and enkindle in us the fire of Thy love.

³ <https://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/speaking-and-writing/sermons/power-love-bishop-michael-currys-sermon-wedding-prince-harry-and>