

PENTECOST
2013
(A TIME OF LOTS OF PASTORAL NEED IN THE CONGREGATION)

Pentecost is a wonderful day. It's a day of celebration. Lots of people call it the birthday of the church – the day when the church was really born, came to life, knew it could survive and thrive and change the world

We could spend our worship time saying “happy birthday church”

It's the day the people heard the good news of Jesus' message: God's love for everyone – in the language they needed to hear. The language of their heart's home.

We could ask ourselves what languages do we need to speak so that everyone can hear? The language of twitter and text; the language of technology and economics and science and academia.... of education, of mental health, the language of addiction and medicine and

so many languages so many ways to speak the gospel. How to translate, how to be faithful?

Good Pentecost questions. For another Pentecost, I think though.

Today, I want to say only this:

GOD IS WITH YOU. GOD LOVES YOU. GOD IS THERE FOR YOU WHEN YOU THINK YOU ARE ALONE. GOD'S SPIRIT COMES AT THE MOST UNEXPECTED TIMES WITH COURAGE AND STRENGTH WHEN YOU THINK THERE IS NONE.

The message of Pentecost is this: you are not alone.

When Jesus had died and rose from the dead, the Bible records stories of his appearance to his friends. He showed up at the sea, on the shore, in a garden, behind locked doors.... he showed them that he was with them and that death had not destroyed him or the truth he came to be and to live.

And then, the story goes, he was taken up into heaven and didn't appear to them any more. Before he went, he said that God would send the spirit; that we shouldn't be afraid and that God's spirit would come to comfort and be with us.

The disciples waited. They waited some more. They felt alone. They knew what Jesus said, but still they felt confused and alone. We know what that's like. We know that

feeling of “what do I do now” and being confused and afraid and alone.

They got together (good thing to do when you're feeling that way isn't it?)
they got together and
suddenly....
you know what happened.

Luke says it was like wind, and like fire

John says it was like breath and the touch of a friend saying Peace.

Whatever it was they knew. They knew they were not alone and that it was going to be ok. They knew that God was with them no matter what and they were filled with peace and joy so much so that people thought they were drunk.

Sometimes it's like fire and wind.
Sometimes it's like a friend's touch
sometimes it's like someone just saying it's going to be ok

and when one person says that, speaks the truth -
others can hear it and be encouraged too and then....it spreads, kind of like fire in wind.

Sometimes all it takes is someone to speak of comfort and healing sort of like this

*There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole
there is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin sick soul*

*Sometimes I feel discouraged and think my work's in vain
but then the holy spirit revives my soul again*

*If you cannot preach like Peter if you cannot pray like Paul
you can tell the love of Jesus and say He died for all*

This week I've been asking people how they experience the Spirit.
It's fascinating. I'm going to give you a couple of their responses and ask you to think about how it is for you.

One person, going through a very hard time right now, said this:

“It's like I'm holding a helium balloon. Sometimes I can see the balloon and it's beautiful and full of lovely light. Sometimes, though, I can't see it. All I have is the string. I can

hold onto the string. I feel the tug; I know it's up there even if I can't see it but I can hold onto the string. Sometimes that's all I have and it has to be enough. And I'm not letting the string go”

For another person, also going through a hard time (lots of that right now. LOTS) For her it's more inner. Not a balloon up there but ...a Presence inside. She said that, not always, but in very hard times, there is a Presence inside her. It's her, but it's more than her. A still presence and she simply knows that she is not alone.

Someone else talked about a change – he used to feel strongly guided in specific ways in his life, from a place outside himself. The Spirit, saying “do THIS” and then having moved to a different place, where the Spirit is more like a companion saying “is this what you want to do?” and walking with him as he makes decision after hard decision, without the clear, direct guidance he used to feel.

Someone else talked about being quiet, and in touch with her body, and seeing colours....lots of colours and a small, gold centre. And she just knew. She just knew.

This is the last one – I love this image. - someone said that for her the feeling of God's Spirit is inside, a joy and a thankfulness for – for everything – that she just can't keep in. And when she feels the Spirit in that way, it's like a big burp building up inside her and she just has to let it out or she'll explode. Isn't that great?

I don't know what it's like for you. Luke says like wind and fire. John says like the breath of a friend saying Peace

Whatever it is for you – and whether or not you feel the Spirit right now
Please know this:

God loves you beyond imagining. You are never alone

God promised.

If it's a waiting time for you then wait. Loiter with intent. Put yourself in places where you're likely to encounter the Spirit

and don't be surprised if it takes a long time.....it often does. All the prophets, all the faithful people who ever wrote, wrote about times of emptiness and waiting. It's part of a faithful life.

But the Spirit is there, and the Spirit will come.

The Spirit is full of mischief – has a sense of humour, and comes in ways exactly right for each person. In ways and places we'd never imagine.