



Pentecost

Sermon by Ven Moses Thabethe



Sunday 23 May 2021

READINGS

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

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Astronomy has taught us that sound waves cannot travel through space's vacuum and therefore are inaudible to human ears. However, since the 1990s NASA has been able to utilise spacecrafts such as Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 and Cassini, travelling in deep space among the stars (interstellar they call it) to detect energy from the planets and astronomers were able to convert it into sounds and frequencies that we humans can hear. This has since revolutionized the way we experiencing the universe not just with one sense, sight, but now with sound as well.

For me, this demonstrated the magnanimity of God, the Creator of the universe and of all life. It further demonstrated the great energy that pulses through creation. I'm reminded of this as we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost today – recalling the coming of the Holy Spirit to the gathered crowds in the early Jerusalem community: "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting." Luke tells us in the Acts of the Apostles 2:1-2).

This is also echoed in St Paul's words to the Romans in Chapter 8: 22-23

22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains until now;

8:23 and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption as sons and daughters, the redemption of our bodies.

So, humanity, animals, plants, galaxies – we groan in anticipation for the arrival of the Spirit of God who brings peace and justice to the world. Our response to this, is to become messengers who carry good news even as we go about our daily life. So, when we celebrate Pentecost, we share our collective recognition that God is with us still, God is still speaking, God is still acting in our lives and in the life of the world that God loves so well.

In the New Testament story Luke tells in the Acts of the Apostles, the Spirit descended on 120 believers in Jerusalem on the fiftieth day after Jesus' resurrection. These crowds of devout Jewish worshippers had gathered for their great Shavout pilgrimage – the celebration of harvest festival and commemoration of the anniversary of the giving of the law at Mount Sinai. The Spirit empowered them to testify to God's great work, emboldened the apostle Peter to preach to a bewildered crowd of different language groups,

that three thousand were converted in one day. It is for this reason that for Christians, Pentecost marks the birthday of the Church.

Today the Holy Spirit continues to lead us, to guide us. to shake us out of our complacencies, even disturbing us out of our passiveness. The great question of leveled at the Church today is: Do we listen to the Spirit's promptings?

In today's chaotic world stricken by the covid-19 pandemic – I mean, here we are, facing a third wave in Gauteng province - the temptation for us and the church might to freeze in fear and be content solely with our own security and self-preservation. Another temptation might be to go back to the old normal after the pandemic is over as if nothing happened and continue to rely on our human capacity and wisdom. These times calls for more solidarity of all people and discernment and reliance on the surprises and creativity of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

The Holy Spirit re-created the disciples. The Holy Spirit set the disciples on fire. Compare the apostles before and after Pentecost, oh what a difference the Spirit makes. From timid they became bold, from lethargic they became energetic and from fearful they became courageous – all for the sake of the good news of Jesus.

As the passage from the Gospel of John announces, the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus promised to his followers, is the great gift of God who will give us wisdom and insight. The Spirit of Christ help us to live through the tension of our many fears and anxieties and embolden us with courage. So, the description of Pentecost paints the church as a community of believers who should be characterized by:

Multiple languages – a church that should be about God bringing people from all different nations and cultures into a full and equal relationship with their God – no superiority of one group over another. Something happens when we speak each other's languages. We experience the limits of our own words and perspectives. We become curious. We discover that God's "mighty works" are far greater for a single language, culture, race, sexuality, religion!

The other characteristic of the church of Pentecost is that of Diversity or lots of difference – so we don't need to all be the same we can be who God made us to be – we are all part of God's family, that our diversity is to be celebrated not shame because we all belong.

So, this day, as we celebrate this great Feast of the Church, let us dare to hear what the Spirit is saying to us as individuals and as a community. Today the Pentecost story invites us to trust that no matter how inadequate, or silly we may feel, God's Spirit is in our hearts and in our church and in our community! And the Spirit invites us to embrace the fire it ignites in us!

Send us your Spirit O Lord, and renew the face of the earth. Amen!