

Pentecost Day: May 20, 2018

Rev. Ken Wratten at St. Luke's

Acts 2:1-21                      The HS descends on Jesus' followers, assembled together in an upstairs room. They spoke in other tongues, speaking about God's deeds of power.

Psalms 104:25-35, 37            You send forth your Spirit, and so you renew the face of the earth.

Romans 8:22-27                We have the first fruits of the Spirit.

John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15       I still have many things to say to you.

I like order. I like systems; schedules; and spreadsheets with embedded formulas. I like planning meetings; things written down in one place with notations of action items that are due. I try to loosen up, but I can't. I like to be prepared for what is going to happen, and for what might happen. I need to know I have done all that I can to be prepared for any surprises, and maybe even avoid them. The problem with my problem - is that I have learned life is full of surprises.

As Jesus' earthly ministry was coming to an end, he still had more he wanted to share with his disciples. But he knew that they were not ready to understand everything all at once. Jesus told them that his Spirit would come and be with them and guide them in what is the truth; and his Spirit would be there for all believers, as the Spirit was there for all believers on Pentecost. The Spirit would enable those first believers - and will enable us - to gradually and more fully understand what Jesus has already given us, what he has done for us, and how he is still helping us.

Jesus was giving us fair warning that our relationship with God cannot be defined in a sentence, or in a 12 minute sermon, or in a Dummies Book on God. The relationship you and I have with God evolves; and it never stops evolving. God the Son accepted the physical limitations of a human body, which included being in one place at a time. But with his ascension into heaven, he was able to send us his Holy Spirit; and with that event the limitations are gone. Spirit can be everywhere and anywhere. She (Sophia) is like Sarayu in the book *The Shack*. She is sensed as motion and color and fragrance; she appears and disappears, but is always here. She cannot be pinned down; she is full of surprises.

My relationship with God has led to a closer relationship with His Spirit. She has given me lots of lessons in building trust in the surprises God has in store for me. That does not mean I understand unexpected events as they happen to me. But Jesus said that we would not understand what life with him is like all at once. His Spirit is continually with us to help us recognize when God is working, and to warn us when other forces are trying to sneak their way into our lives.

I found a very interesting description of the impact that God's Spirit has in our lives. Henry P. Van Dusen is a former President of Union Theological Seminary in New York City. He describes two critical effects that happened on Pentecost Day for the life of believers. One was "intimacy" and the other was "potency."

Regarding ‘intimacy’: A supernatural sense of God’s closeness was felt by each of the disciples, and it was shared among them as a group—They felt the presence of a power to lead and guide and strengthen them in their ministry. You and I are reacting to our awareness of the intimacy of God the Spirit when we talk with Her. “Spirit, I need you today. I’m counting on you to be right with me through my day, as only a spirit can be.” “Spirit, I need to share a fear with you that I’ve never dared to tell anybody.” “Spirit, I need to share a wish; I need to share a big mistake I have made; I need to share something I have always regretted.” The gift of Christ’s Spirit is God’s invitation to intimacy with Him.

The other mark of Christ’s Spirit coming into the life of that first faith community, was the gift of potency, of spiritual power—they being able to act as Jesus had acted, to think as Jesus had thought: being God-centered in what motivated them. Working with the gift of God the Spirit, you and I can ask;

That our prayers will carry power to accomplish things that bring glory to God;

That the Spirit will give you and me the right words at the right time;

That the Spirit will open windows of opportunity with people to bring glory to God;

That the Spirit will sharpen our awareness of God during our day;

That the Spirit will grow our understanding of God, that deepens our trust and our faith;

That the Spirit will grow our understanding of who God wants each of us to be.

I like these two perspectives on the work of the Holy Spirit: intimacy and potency. I guess that the gift of the Spirit is not a gift that brings answers to all of our questions. But by knowing about this dimension of God’s relationship with us, we can trust that God is with all of us, all at once, all the time. We can trust that our awareness of the Spirit’s presence deepens over time. We can learn to live life without having all the answers, and without needing all the answers.

This confidence in having God the Spirit with me at all times has helped me to relax more than I used to; it has helped me trust God more than I used to; it has helped me live better with life’s surprises.

Pentecost Day is called the Birthday of the church. And it is quite a birthday gift that God offers to us – who are his church. Come, Holy Spirit. Amen.