

“When the Spirit Comes”

Acts 2:1-11

Today is Pentecost Sunday, the 50th day after the day of Resurrection. It marks the beginning of a new season. Pentecost is also considered as the “birthday “of the church. From that day when the apostles were filled by the Spirit and witness about the risen Christ, this small band of believers grew and a new community known as the church spreads all over the world. The liturgical color is red – to remind us of the tongues of flame and also of the blood of the martyrs of every generation of believers who witness to the faith even at cost of their lives.

The Christian Pentecost also coincides with the Jewish celebration of the Feast of the Harvest, which is 50 days after the Passover. This is the day when they gather the first fruits of the farm, a festival of joy and thanksgiving celebrating the completion of the harvest season. Today we remember the first fruit of the harvest in the Lord’s vineyard – women and men who believed and formed part of the early church.

Today, the print and the broadcast media reminds us again and again that we celebrate Mother’s Day. This is a noble celebration as we remember our mothers who are worthy of honor and recognition. This celebration is not part of the liturgical calendar. In fact some of the churches came to know it only in the early part of the 20th century. What is worthwhile to remember is that Mother’s Day is a celebration rooted in the campaign for peace in a world that experienced the horrors of war. Today, the original intention was totally overtaken by the commercial interest. Mother’s day is set on the second Sunday of May. Pentecost is a movable feast as we count the 50th day whenever we celebrate Easter Sunday. While there is nothing wrong in celebrating Mother Day, let us not be drawn away from the cycle and seasons of the church that ground us in the sacred and the continuing stories of God’s redemption.

The account in Acts chapter 2 provides us a picture of what happened during that day. Before Jesus departed he gave specific instruction. Earlier (Acts 1:4b) he gave them this command, "*Do*

not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. He was referring to the gift of the Holy Spirit which the apostles received this day.

Luke found it difficult to describe what really happened. This is true to any ecstatic experience. Try to put into writing and capture in words an experience of great importance to you. At times photographs and images are more effective medium, so there are moments that they are presented without captions because in many cases it speaks for itself. But Luke does not have the luxury of a digital camera to capture the events. Like poets of old, what he had were words to describe this event of a life-time. This is what he recorded:

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them.

Notice the use of the phrases, “a sound like a violent wind,” or “they saw what seemed to be.” It was difficult to describe and to capture the event in words. What we know is that the apostles went into a kind of an extraordinary experience. What comes next is clear, In v. 6, it says *When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.* On the day of Pentecost, the apostles spoke not the unintelligible babbling and sounds, they spoke the different languages of the people who gathered in Jerusalem that day for the celebration of the Feast of the Harvest. It was amazing and people could not believe it – but it happened. On that day people from other nations heard the story of the risen Christ in their own language.

Today, almost every tribe on earth heard the good news about Jesus. Some Christian groups specialize in translating the Bible into the different vernacular so that people can read the story in their own languages wherever live. Others go into far places and

live with the people and witness through their lives and service the risen Christ. From the day of Pentecost, Christians in every generation preached the gospel in words and in deeds and in indeed the harvest is great. In some cases the magnitude of the harvest is so huge and the laborers are so few.

As we read again the story of the Pentecost there are things that stand out in the lives of those who received the Spirit. Something happened to people when the Spirit comes into their life.

First, when the Spirit comes, there is power! The apostles experience a power that comes from above. They were mostly fishermen that work with their hands yet on the very moment they were able to do something that was not part of their usual routine – they were able to speak and stand for Jesus who was crucified just 53 days ago.

That was a high risk proposition. Rumors were circulating that Jesus had risen but nobody yet stood publicly and announced the news. Anything could happen they could be arrested and put on jail or worst suffer the same fate as Jesus right there and then. But they experienced a power much stronger than fear, they preached and they testified that Jesus is the son of God and he is indeed risen!

Talking about power from above, I remember the story shared to me by someone who experienced WWII. In our place when it was not as crowded as it is today, we had a place in the beach where an old couple sells food stuff for those who go on swimming. But it was not only a store but a place where people sit down and relax and tell stories or discuss issues of the day. The store was now gone and all the folks are now dead. But that was the place where I love to be and learn history that was not written in the text books.

He recounted vividly the events of that day, food was scarce and being the oldest in the family he volunteer to go into the fields to dig root crops (camote and cassava) and gather firewood. It was hot and he took a dip in the river to cool him self off. Then he went upstream moving slowly hoping to find something to eat for their family. Along the way he heard sounds indicating that someone is washing clothes. She saw a lady and he just greeted and passed her

by.

Without their knowledge, there were two Japanese soldiers who were sent as scouts from a larger group that was on patrol. As he was walking upstream, he heard a frightened voice of a woman shouting for help. He said, those days when you hear something unusual you have to hide and keep alert before you do anything.

But he said, something strange happened to him. Instead of hiding he ran downstream to where the voice came and there he found the two Japanese soldiers who were about to rape the woman. When he saw it – he shouted to the top of his voice and to his surprise the soldiers ran. They also ran as fast as they can in the opposite direction. As they sat down and grasp for breath, the woman thank him and went into the barrio.

Later, he reflected what he had done. He said; “it was surprising and a bit foolish, I did not even know the name of the woman but why did I acted that way.” He recalled the fear that gripped his body as it dawn upon him that he could be shot or be stabbed by the bayonet at that moment. But he said that some kind of a power pushed him to do it because he knew that what they did was wrong.

There are many situations in life when we ourselves are surprised by our courage. And later when we look those events in retrospect, we know that there is something that propels us to stand for truth and be steadfast in faith regardless of the consequence. We now know that the power that works in us is not from us but from God. The power is God’s spirit working in us.

Second, when the Spirit comes it transforms people. This is what we see in the lives of the apostles. Since the start of their journey with Jesus, they had been transformed day after day. From fishermen to being fishers of men and on this day of Pentecost God transform them from being timid and shy to being daring and bold.

This is the biblical witness – when the Spirit come it transform people. The lives of people in the Bible is a testimony of God’s transformation from Abraham and Sarah to Moses and Miriam and

David and Paul and even today when we allow the Spirit to move into our lives the Spirit will and can transform us from what we are now to what we should be.

As I wrote this sermon, I hear the sound of the birds chirping outside. Looking at the window one cannot help but notice the leaves of the trees. A few months ago the scenario was different but the transformation from winter to spring is now clearly defined with the green leaves blooming.

Look at your life today, where were you in your faith journey years ago? With God's Spirit in our lives, we cannot help but notice the exciting changes that continue to happen even as we speak. Pentecost was just the beginning of the great transformation of the world and of the lives of those who believe.

As we love to say in the UCC circle, "do not put a period where God placed a coma." Believing in the Pentecost, believing in the coming of the Spirit is sharing the excitement of a future not only with a God who empowers but also of the God who transforms us.

A story was told of Sir Edmund Hillary, the first man to climb Mt. Everest, the highest in the world. He was knighted for his efforts and became famous. He wrote a book about his journey entitled, "High Adventure." Climbing the Everest was not that easy. In fact in 1952 he attempted to conquer Mt. Everest but he failed.

On that year he was invited by a group of mountain climbers in England to address its members. Hillary walked on the stage to a thunderous applause. The audience was recognizing an attempt at greatness, but Edmund Hillary saw himself as a failure. He moved away from the microphone and walked to the edge of the platform. He made a fist and pointed at a picture of the mountain. He said in a loud voice, "Mount Everest, you beat me the first time, but I'll beat you the next time because you've grown all you are going to grow... but I'm still growing!" And he did because he made it to the top of Mt. Everest on May 29, 1953. (Brian Cavanaugh, T.O.R., Source Unknown)

The spirit of Pentecost is God's Spirit transforming failure to glory. God has gifted us with the Spirit – it is now time to use its power and look forward to the transformation that it brings upon our lives. Amen.

Pentecost Sunday 2008

Pentecost Sunday

May 11, 2008 – 1:30 P.M.

Preacher: Rev. Reuben D. Cedino
Sermon: *"When the Spirit Comes"*

SCRIPTURE READING:

1st Reading: Acts 2:1-21

Gospel: John 7:37-39

Anthem: "Holy Spirit, Speak to Me"
Fil-Am UCC Choir

Liturgist: Ms. Laura Malaki-Lambert
Pianist: Ms. Jean Nabong
Offertory Solo: Ms. Alfa Garcia
Organist and Choral Director: Ms. Rachel A. Dadap

Mr. Michael Dadap, Elder-in-Charge
Ms. Lily Manalo, Steward-in-Charge
Ms. Pinky Sevileno, Trustee-in-Charge
Ms. Dinah Neri & Ms. Pinky Sevileno, Ushers
Rev. & Mrs. Rizalio & Jane Manigsaca, Floral Offering