

The Day of Pentecost
May 23, 2010
The Church of the Atonement
The Youth of the Parish

Acts 2:1-21; Romans 8:14-17; John 14:8-27

All three of today's lessons from the Bible tell about the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to the people. Some of the gifts are easy to see and hear, but they are hard to believe.

The Bible tells us that on the day of Pentecost, which was a harvest festival, all of the disciples of Jesus were together in a room. The room was filled with the sound of wind. That is not so hard to imagine. Sometimes it gets windy enough around here that we can hear the sound of the wind even when we are inside.

But then, it looked like the natural world came inside, and flames of fire rested on the tops of the heads of the disciples. None of us have ever seen that. We cannot imagine what it would look like.

Wind and fire are gifts of the Spirit that we see in the natural world. And we know of things in the natural world that make us think of the power of God. Waves on the shore, the beauty of the Grand Canyon, even thunder and lightening in a summer storm can make us think of the power of God.

The disciples began to talk about what was happening. Because they knew about Jesus, they knew a little about the power of God. And so they began to explain it to the crowds who had come to Jerusalem for the festival. The thing is, they all came from different places, and spoke different languages. Now some of us take foreign languages in school, and it seems hard to believe that people could understand each others languages without studying them. But according to the Bible, everyone seemed to understand each other.

Maybe it was something like the communication of athletes on the playing field. We aren't always able to talk things out with teammates, but usually, we can make ourselves be understood. Of course, that works best when we know our teammates really well—there is something about knowing each other that helps communication—and these people seemed to understand each other right away. So, there is something about the power of God that makes it easier to understand people.

Our second lesson was written by the Apostle Paul. He had not been in the room when the wind began to rush, and the tongues of fire showed up on people's heads. But even so, Paul knew about the power of the Spirit of God. So he wrote to Christians in Rome and tried to explain it to them. He talked about a spirit of slavery.

We decided that we did not like that word, *slavery*. When we hear the word, we think about people who are tied up and forced to do things that are wrong. Or we think about the bad history of slavery in this country before the Civil War. But we learned that the slaves that

Paul knew were more like servants. They had jobs to do to take care of their masters—but they were part of the household. We think that Paul was talking about the power of God that allows us to serve other people before we think about ourselves.

The spirit of servanthood that Paul is talking about helps to take away fear. The understanding of one another even though the words didn't make sense, and the relief from fear, reminded one of us of something that happened after school one day. Two brothers were walking home, when they saw a group of boys headed toward them. The older brother knew these boys, and knew that there might be some trouble ahead. The older brother was afraid that his younger brother would be bullied. The older brother was able to signal the younger just by using his eyes—and without a word between them, the two brothers took a side street and ran out of harm's way. The older brother had received a quick shot of the spirit of servanthood—instead of being scared of a group of bullies, his concern for his younger brother got them both out of trouble. And the younger brother got a dose of the spirit of understanding, knowing what to do just by reading his brother's eyes.

The spirit of servanthood is the gift that allows us to help others when we would really rather be doing something else. One of us remembers having a great time working in a soup kitchen one afternoon. The gift for him was the great time getting to know people he had never met before. When he got up that morning, he had no idea that working at the soup kitchen was going to happen. You might say that the *idea* of servanthood was given to him by his mother. But the *gift* of servanthood came in the relationships that he made with the people he served.

The power of the Holy Spirit draws us in to help others. Last week some of us participated in Relay for Life. We were attracted to the event because it is fun—but we know that the money that is raised goes to help those who need it. And maybe some of those people who are affected by cancer have their fears eased because there are people they don't even know who are working to raise money to help them.

Paul told the Romans that one of God's gifts to us is a spirit of adoption. We talked a lot about that, because some of us are adopted. And we understand the truth of adoption: that when you are adopted, something new happens—you are new to your parents and brothers and sisters, and they are new to you. The Holy Spirit gives us the courage to believe that we are the children of God.

But even if the Holy Spirit gives us courage, some of what is in today's lessons is hard to believe. In the Gospel lesson, Jesus says *I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.*

Now, all of us can think of an example when we wanted something really bad—we wanted it so bad that we prayed for it—and then we didn't get it. So, what does Jesus mean? It seems like it is not a good idea to stand up here in church and suggest that Jesus might be lying. So how can what the Bible says be true, when we don't always get what we want?

We talked about this a lot. Finally we decided that the truth of Jesus is that he wants us to be the people that God made us to be. He wants us to be the very best versions of ourselves that we can be. And if we are living in the power of the Holy Spirit—then we will ask for things in the spirit of understanding, and servanthood, and adoption that the Holy Spirit gives us.

Sometimes we surprise ourselves by knowing how to do something, or how to behave in a difficult situation. One of us remembers a time when his dad was really sick. His mom was really freaked out—and he told us that on the inside, he was freaked out, too. But as he looks back on it now, he realizes that he acted calmly. And he knows that his ability to act calmly helped to calm his mom down. How did he know how to behave? Maybe it was the Holy Spirit, giving him something that he didn't even really know how to ask for—but giving him something he needed to be able to be the best he could be at a difficult time.

The Holy Spirit is God giving us the power to live good lives. If we pay attention to the gifts we are given, then we will understand each other, and know how to help others, and be able to work to become the children of God that God has created us to be.

Amen.