

STIRRINGS OF THE SPIRIT

Acts 2:1-11; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

As we celebrate the gracious work of the Spirit in our midst---as we baptize, confirm, and receive---we give thanks for this Spirit who is promised by Christ even as he departs from the company of the disciples, at least in the ways by which they had come to know him. As Easter's resurrection experience becomes firmly rooted in us, we wonder what God will do next to draw us into the kingdom envisioned by God. Perhaps, ironically, God brings forth what God has always offered. The Spirit has stirred God's people over the ages.

The people gathered in Jerusalem should not have been surprised by the Pentecost event. Set aside in Judaism to give thanks for the harvest of first fruits and for the gift of the Torah, this holiday brought the faithful together to witness to God's presence and work in the world. As might be expected, remembering past gifts often brought forth new expressions of God's grace. So it was on that day in Jerusalem. The account itself may suggest how the Spirit stirs.

The Spirit stirs to bring forth perceptions that transcend the fears, the hatreds, the divisions, the politics, even the traditions of the people. Though initially judged to be a result of early morning drunkenness, the multiple tongues spoken and, more importantly heard, declare the universal nature of the presence of God's spirit. For much of its history, Israel counted itself to be a chosen, exceptional nation, as though God had abandoned all but the few tribes existing on the narrow strip of land along the Mediterranean. Both prophets and psalmist remind Israel that people will be invited to come from the north and south, the east and west, from the farthest parts of the world to offer praise and worship, even in Jerusalem. Today, the spirit urges us beyond exceptionalism to an understanding of the universal intent and nature of God's peace. We are all God's children, a relationship that moves us beyond our self-serving desires to hope for all the world.

The Pentecost event further reveals the way of the Spirit in the matter of time and place. Though many would expect such a revelation to occur in holy Jerusalem, especially during a time of gathering, the spirit stirs when it wishes, where it will. Saul---Paul---was not prepared for how the Spirit would stir him as he approached Damascus, ready and quite able to destroy the community of followers in that city. Nor were the threatened Hebrews expecting the parting of a sea to allow them to cross over into the

wilderness. Today, we must learn that the Spirit may stir us at any moment, in any place where we might be. Perhaps finally we are stirred by this Spirit of God to recognize the homeless among us as needy of not just our money but our attention. Perhaps suddenly the number of children and youth slain by guns will stir us to insist on changes that provide greater safety for all. Perhaps the absolute waste that is war will overwhelm our willingness to resolve differences through violence and devastation and we will be insistent on creating a climate of greater justice and compassion wherein we need not, will not study war anymore. Let these who come to be baptized, confirmed in faith, and received as professing members be aware that the spirit is already stirring them in ways they may not notice...yet.

The Day of Pentecost suggests to some that the Spirit stirs in such a manner, that powerful confusion may reign. The images of wind and fire as well as multiple tongues build an understanding that the stirring of the Spirit may create a sense of chaos out of which some new light might dawn. The Pentecostal movement within wider Christianity is growing more rapidly than any other identified group of followers of Jesus. Though always present in smaller numbers, this movement has gained traction among many who wish to have not only a personal relationship with God but permission to portray it more emotionally and more publically, creating a further division within the wide spectrum of worship styles and mission emphases. People responding to John Wesley's more heartfelt faith ridiculed him and his community for methodical practices as well as accusing Wesley of being an "enthusiast", part of those who rebelled against the restrictions of the church in favor of developing an "enthusiasm" for gospel preached and lived. The revivalist responses to the spirit is an outgrowth of this movement as is the emphasis on social action now observe in the most long-standing of traditions.

Perhaps the stirrings of the Spirit will encourage us to understand that we receive and respond to this Spirit in various ways, none of which is more authentic than the other. Understanding that patterns of worship and practice that may be comfortable and even inspiring for us, may not be "right"...except for us. Many musical styles are available, several physical responses from loud, raucous dancing to quiet, withdrawn prayer, numerous expressions from some which are counted well-polished and complex expressions to simple, easily-remember phrases, Anything---everything---that draws us to God can be considered to be a stirring of the Spirit. We can hope that those who are baptized, confirmed, and welcomed today will continue to discover the richness of God's grace and the wealth of traditions

that are represented in the church wherever it is encountered.

The stirrings of Spirit will always draw us out of our carefully-tended self into the wider arena of God's creating activity. On Pentecost, Peter arises to remind those suddenly stirred up by wind and fire that they existed within a long line of those who, quoting Joel, would break forth in prophesying, see visions, and dream dreams, all of which would be designed to align the people with the work of God. As Peter plumbed the resistance of those gathered, he declares that not all would respond to the Spirit, at least in any one moment. But, as the record of the Acts of the Apostles recounts, the Spirit will continue to stir.

Perhaps we would want to warn he who is baptized, they who are confirmed, and these who are received as members that they may find themselves suddenly stirred to consider unexpected invitations to God's call to be gospel. Just because they have received the waters of grace, and undertaken preparation for the work of faith, and even been welcomed into a community of faith, that the Spirit has finished its work with them and through them. This Advocate, this one "who speaks for God" who is promised by the Risen Christ and present since the beginning of all creation, continues to speak to us. How shall we listen? We can count on the Spirit to stir us out of our smug complacency and launch us, perhaps again, into a world that needs our witness to the love and grace, the mercy and justice, the peace of God. And the Spirit will equip us to do so. Thanks be to God. Amen.