

“In the Eye of the Storm”

- When I was a kid growing up in Arkansas
 - There were several distinct times, memories that I have, of tornados going through our state and near our home
 - Most of the time, when we would hear the tornado siren at our house, you can guess what we would do...
 - Did you do this?? We would go outside to see it.
 - I know, it's crazy in retrospect!
 - I have a lot of memories looking up at the clouds, and almost no memories of hunkering down in the bathroom
 - I don't know- maybe you do to! maybe that's a common thing
 - I remember one time hunkering down... it was when I was working in high school at a grocery store as a clerk
 - Stocking, checking, sacking, and carrying out groceries for customers
 - And the sirens went off while I was working
 - We knew the safest place to be was going to be the cooler in the back, because there were no windows
 - So we ushered everyone into the back room outside the cooler, poised to enter if the tornado hit
 - We all just stood around there and waited... and waited... nothing.
 - And as human nature tends to do, soon one or two decided they were done with being safe and idle, and went outside to their cars
 - Soon, and probably way too soon considering, we all decided it was time to go back to business.
 - I count myself lucky to say that none of these tornados ever caused damage to our home or to our family, or the people at the store
 - Now I have never lived through one of these, but we have watched the news channel and radar maps enough times worrying about them
 - And seeing those massive swirling colors the meteorologists use to show the storm
 - And sometimes, on the really big ones, the clear, calm spot right in the middle...
 - The Eye.

- That place where I am told, and have seen videos, where everything suddenly becomes calm and foreboding
- As I read this familiar Pentecost story this morning, we hear how the wind blows, how it literally pushes them out
- I wonder if that later that night there wasn't a short calm- the eye of their storm- that came to them as they wondered what had happened
- And what would happen next...
- And while this Holy wind was not devastating to them physically as a tornado tends to be
- It leveled their emotional and spiritual world, to so speak, and they had to start all over gain.
- Everything in them was being rearranged, remade, reconfigured
- Our Gospel this morning is from John, and it will likely sound familiar
- We read a longer excerpt of this text a couple of weeks ago when we heard about Thomas and Jesus' two appearances to the disciples
- It was there he gave them his Peace, and breathed on them, setting the stage for this next chapter in the book of Acts
- It occurred to me as Jesus breathed Peace and Spirit onto the disciples in that upper room
- Maybe the reading this morning from Acts is God's breathing on the entire world, also giving Peace and Spirit... And also change
- So as you can imagine then, God's breathing was not calm or quiet- it could not be contained or go unnoticed
- The reading from Acts says that when the day of Pentecost came, they were all gathered together ¹
- This was not accidental- Jews were gathering from all over to celebrate the Jewish Holiday *Shavuot*² (*SHA-VOO-AUGHT*) ³
- The celebration of the giving of the law to Moses on Mt. Sinai
- It is not easy to pick up on the timing here and see Pentecost as another divine revelation to God's people
- The law delivered again, only this time to a group of people who can point to God's ultimate revelation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- They were there together and a rush of a violent wind filled the house

¹ PulpitFiction 2020, <https://www.pulpitfiction.com/notes/pentecosta>

² <https://www.ifcj.org/learn/jewish-holidays/shavuot/what-is-shavuot-pentecost/>

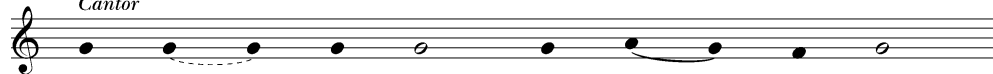
³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mboDGPzD1po>

- Tongues of fire appeared over their heads, another reference to Moses, I think- his face shown after encountering God
- Some translations say he had a horn growing out of his head
- Acts records tongues of fire
- You get the feeling that witnessing such amazing and divine moments are just beyond words and descriptions
- They begin speaking in ways that everyone from everywhere can understand
- And the noise, between the sounds of the wind and the the disciples speaking in ways that everyone could understand- it got everyone's attention
- There were people from almost every nation gathered... I want to name them again
 - Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs
- After this week I would be remiss if I did not pause here for a moment
 - And just let it all sink in.
 - The breath that God had breathed did not stay with the elect
 - It blew the hair of everyone there, entered the lungs and hearts of everyone there without regards to origin, skin, or nationality
 - Stirred up the dust at everyone's feet
 - Scripture interpretation leans toward this mighty wind literally pushing the disciples out into the street
 - As the Holy Spirit still does today, which we will talk about more in a few moments
 - Perhaps it would be wise to contextualize this for what the Holy Spirit is in fact doing today
 - They all heard God speak and breath:
 - Mexicans, Africans, Canadians, and Europeans.
 - Those from Asia, China, Japan, and the Paicic Islands
 - Russia, Korea, both the north and the south, and people living right there with ancestry from every part of the world
 - And skin tones from the whole rainbow of God's creation
 - Christians cannot move into this Pentecost and hear how God's breath and spirit transcends all of this skin-deep difference
 - And not stand against systemic racism.
 - Our country's longest running sin... well at least it's a tie for first place with the sin of greed.

- We may have eliminated slavery of African-Americans in the US, but we have not removed the prejudice that allowed it to happen in the first place
- The devaluing and dehumanizing of people with dark skin
- It must be named. It must never be forgotten.
- Because God's work is bigger than one race, one nation- so big is God's dream that it encompasses all of creation
- All of the people God loves and counts as children
- The Kingdom of God will never be complete without all of us.
- And so the Holy Spirit, the breath of God, continues to blow through us, dislodging us, displacing us, seemingly tearing down everything
 - But to make room for new things
 - This year we have been pushed out from our buildings, not by God or by the Holy Spirit... I don't think God works through deadly viruses
 - That's bad theology
 - But this virus has removed our ability to ignore what the Spirit has been perhaps wanting for a long time.
 - I will be the first to rejoice in the return to our beautiful worship space, where we gather in visual beauty
 - A-washed with beautiful music, and the smell of incense in the air
 - But a lesson I am trying to learn, the thing I have to remind myself of over and over
 - Is that while those things are extremely useful and meaningful and aid in my spiritual journey and relationship to God- indeed I think they they are irreplaceable
 - They are only tools and means to a greater end.
 - A pit stop in the race.
 - I am certain that the Holy Spirit is using our current situation- not causing it, mind you, but using it- to teach us that lesson again.
- I feel like we are in the eye
 - We've been blown out of the building and out of almost everything that seems routine and comfortable
 - We have even been challenged by the lack of human interaction- a fundamental human need
 - We have been disrupted.
 - And we are not done yet, not with COVID
 - But much more and more longer lasting, we are not done with the HoLY Spirit blowing us around.
 - All I can say is, Come Holy Spirit!

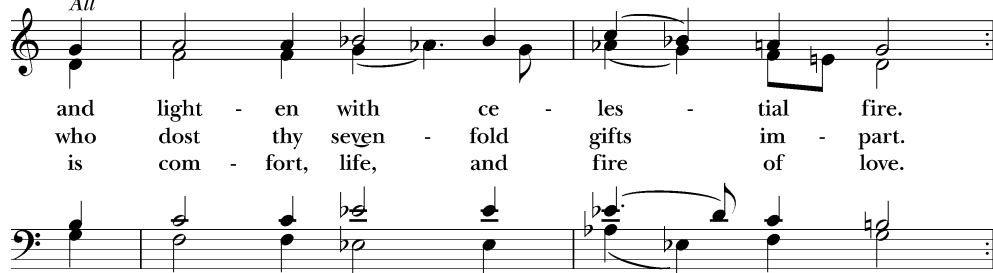
- Do you know that hymn, it's in our hymnal and is often chanted by the bishop while ordaining a priest or deacon
- It is the hymn and prayer asking the Holy Spirit to come and do the ordaining.

Cantor



1 Come, Ho - ly Ghost, our souls in - spire,
 2 Thou the a - noint - ing Spi - rit art,
 3 Thy bless - ed unc - tion from a - bove

All



and light - en with ce - les - tial fire.
 who dost thy seven - fold gifts im - part.
 is com - fort, life, and fire of love.

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- Come Holy Spirit.
- Blow us out through the other side of this storm, and don't leave us
- Blow the dust off of our sins and reveal them, both individual and systemic, so that we may repent and be forgiven
- Complete in us the work you have begun, use every means you can
- And bring with you comfort for when it hurts us, when it makes us angry, or sad, or scared
- And most of all, give us faith to see through the unmaking, and believe that with you there is something more to come
- Something beautiful, something divine, something God has been planning and working on for a long time,
 - And will continue to do so
- This vision, this goal, we call the Kingdom of God
- Bring with you the courage I need to be a part of it.
- Come, Holy Spirit, come.

Amen.