

The Day of Pentecost
May 23, 2010
John 20:19-23; Acts 2:1-21

Where would our world be today without the life giving *spirit* of God?
What would our faith look like if it was a faith based solely on Jesus Christ's death, resurrection and ascension?
What would our faith look like if we did not recognize the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in and among us all?

We could certainly celebrate in gratitude what God had done for us through the incarnation.
We could remember the events of 2000 years ago and the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and how the Spirit was present in Him and his work.
We could celebrate God's defeat of sin and death.

But our God would be distant.
Our hope would be static.
And our ministry would be devoid of creativity, significance and power.

Without the power of God's spirit – brushing by our cheeks as baby's breath, swirling among us like a mighty wind, and alighting on us like flames of fire, we would only be as the disciples were 2000 years ago: locked away by ourselves, paralyzed and cut off by our grief and fear.

We would build up walls, lock ourselves away, cut ourselves off from the outside, hunker down with like-minded individuals, incestuously moving in circles of those just like us – those who look like us, act like us, talk like us, and believe as we do. We would be safe, but – inside - we would be dying.

It actually sounds somewhat familiar. There are so many of us who are imprisoned and cut off, so many of us who turn the locks and build up walls.

Sometimes I wonder if we have ever really felt the power of what we celebrate today.
Sometimes I wonder if we truly believe what it is we celebrate:

the awesome power of God to inform our dreams and guide us to freedom

the awesome power of God to help us, to inspire us, to give us new ideas, and to open up new possibilities so that we might help bring about the Kingdom of Heaven here on earth, so that we might, alongside our God, love our world into its renewal.

Have we forgotten what it is we celebrate today? Have we closed ourselves off from the wind and fire we need to shape us and shape the freedom we seek? Is it because we haven't felt God's power or because we don't believe in it?

I read this week the story of a man, Robert Krentz, who was murdered on his Arizona ranch two months ago. I read about the grief that gripped his community of friends and family. I read about the fear of his fellow ranchers who go to work every day to tend their cattle, often driving long distances by themselves through rugged land. The area is so vast and so rugged that it has long been used by armed and dangerous drug smugglers. It has also long remained unprotected by law enforcement agencies.

The reaction of a grieving, fearful and frustrated community has been swift and severe. The impact of the murder and the response to it - as well as to other instances of violence along the southern border of this country - has been wide and far reaching.

Though the issue may seem clear cut, black and white, a simple issue of justice, it is complicated by other factors.

For one, the same land used by ranchers and drug dealers, has also been used by men and women entering into the US illegally, risking their lives in the arid land in the hopes of a brighter future for their family.

It is these people - aliens in a foreign land - the rancher from Arizona would try to help – offering water to those he encountered on his land. He likely approached the man who murdered him as he would someone he thought needed help.

The people who are entering this country illegally are being grouped together with the people who are smuggling drugs and killing innocent ranchers.

The law that has been passed in Arizona, and has been the topic of news reports for weeks, is intended to help find and detain violent criminals. However, it will disproportionately affect other immigrants in the state – those who are there illegally as well as those who are there legally, and have been for generations.

That law requires Arizona law enforcement agents to determine the citizenship status of people they stop if the officer has an undefined "reasonable suspicion" that the person is not in this country lawfully.

Fears of racial profiling and abuse of the law abound. The legislation has drawn jokes and commentary, and a viral clip of the First Lady of the United States being asked by a local second grader if her mother was going to be deported because she doesn't have the right papers.

The American Civil Liberties Union and other civil rights groups are filing lawsuits challenging the law's constitutionality.

I see families on both sides of the issues grieving their loss of freedom. I see families hunkering down, locking their doors and becoming more and more suspicious of those unlike themselves.

I see a need for new ideas, new inspiration.

I return to wondering if those of us who call ourselves Christians have really felt the power of what we celebrate today.

I return to wondering if we truly believe what it is we celebrate – the awesome power of God to inform our dreams and lead us on our way to freedom.

I wonder and I pray. I pray for me and I pray for all the people inhabiting our continent.

O Lord, send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

Pour out your Spirit on all flesh.

Come like the wind, O Lord, and fill our world.

Come like fire and rest on us.

O Lord, send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

Breathe on us, breath of God.

Inspire us, your daughters, so that we may prophecy.

Inspire us, your sons, so that we may dream dreams.

O Lord, send forth your Spirit and renew the face of the earth.

Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and inspire our hope.

Send forth your people, O Lord, and inspire our ministry.

Help us to know and spread your peace.

I wonder and I pray.

I pray and I listen.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to God's people.

Listen to the Good News in today's Gospel reading:

Jesus said to his disciples, 'Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.' When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

As it was for the disciples, so it is for all the baptized here today.

So it is for the gathered church.

The Risen Lord has broken through our locked doors; through all the barriers we construct to keep ourselves safe and keep others out.

The Risen Lord is drawing us into the world and giving us a mission.

And he is equipping us with the same Spirit that sustained and inspired His own ministry.

This mission is not given to us as individuals; it is given to us as the Body of Christ for today's world.

Children of God, sons and daughters, we are to dream, to prophecy, to forgive, to reconcile.

This is a world that is hurting. It is a world where great inequalities exist. Where violence claims our best people.

Alone we cannot come up with the answers to the problems plaguing us.

We must reach out to our neighbors. We must speak out.

If our words are inspired, then we know we will be heard.

Listen to one another. Listen for the sound of thunder. For the voice of God.

Prophecy sons and daughters.

And dream with God.

Amen.