

The Holy Spirit has come in power, in wind and fire that filled the house and filled the disciples. As the Spirit had rested on Jesus at his baptism, it rested on them, but not as a dove—as tongues, as of fire.

The Spirit rested on them, but it could not be bottled up or contained. It came bursting out of them, all the power of fire and wind, not as conflagration or holocaust, but in a mighty force of healing. Not scattering the people, blowing them away like a tornado or cyclone, but gathering them together, to listen and to understand. Divisions were healed. All the world, people from every nation under heaven, heard and understood the disciples speaking about God's deeds of power.

The scene looks different in John. Jesus appeared (or became visible) among the frightened disciples who had locked themselves in. "Peace be with you." Again, "Peace be with you." Peace bearing them forgiveness for their having abandoned him. But not peace to keep to themselves. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And *then* he breathed on them.

They breathed in the Spirit, for healing of fear, and healing of divisions. "If you forgive the sins of any"—as they had been forgiven themselves—"they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." If they, or we, retain sins and do not forgive, all of us will remain locked in fear and hostility.

What is given is given to be given away, for the healing of divisions.

Embodied in a prayer: "Creator, Christ, Spirit, Spirit in the world." [Movements: arms reach up; arms reach out at shoulder level; arms drawn in to chest; arms extended, reaching out to the world.]

Jesus has talked about the Spirit often in John. "The Spirit of truth" he has called it. (14:17, 15:26, 16:13) A spirit with nothing to hide, truthful; "transparent" we might say. The Spirit sees the truth, sees reality, names it, makes it known. "Reality" is one of the meanings of the Greek word translated "truth"; which makes sense in English, too. What is true is real.

The Holy Spirit, given by the risen Christ, is what makes it possible for the Body of Christ and all its members to look straight on at the world, to see and name the reality we see, without fear or despair. We see a world divided, not reconciled, a world that does not know how to live with differences and does not seem to want to learn.

We see governments, peoples, groups, individuals stubbornly ignorant and dismissive of the "languages" of others; insisting that their own "language" is the only one that is valid. "Language" being more than vocabulary and grammar, but also culture, history, dreams and disappointments, identity. Without respect or understanding of other languages, we human

beings continually resort to the language of violence and strike out, or shut the others out, cutting off communication altogether.

The same Spirit that interprets to us the world shows us ourselves, too, our own part in creating and tolerating divisions and misunderstandings. But the Spirit frees us to see and name all that is real without fear or despair because the Spirit also reveals the reality of God in the world. The same Spirit through whom we see the suffering of the world that makes us weep—in Burma, Iraq, Africa, or down the street—also fills us with uncanny joy and hope.

The Holy Spirit is *in* the world, even as the world continues divided and unreconciled. The spirit is *in* the Church, even as the Church itself suffers its own divisions.

We have come to know this, here at Redeemer. The Spirit's presence is palpable, in the beauty of this place, its simplicity, light and color; in the reverence of worship, in prayer, silence, song; in the fellowship, welcome and real affection. There is life here, something intangible and real. It isn't us, or any one of us; not the "right" people on Vestry or staff; not programs or services we provide. Not something we've made happen or control. We don't "own" it. It is gift. We are buoyed up by it; it gives us hope even as we look without flinching, though not without tears, at a sad and broken world.

There was a time, not so long ago, when the leadership of our parish was strained, exhausted, worried about money, hoping and praying that more people would "be involved." People still work hard, but a lot more people now. Things seem to flow. We're more like the people of Israel in the Book of Numbers this morning. The spirit rests on many (70 being a number of wholeness, completeness), not just a few. Not just the "official" elected or appointed leaders, and not only in a designated holy place, but everyone of us and everywhere we go. "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!" Moses said.

How did that change happen among us? Not by design, or, at any rate, not by our design. There was prayer and more prayer. Truthful speech. Determination to live in hope not despair, abundance not scarcity. Openness and trust, willingness to take some risks. Sincere desire for God, to serve God and all God's people. We cooperated, but we didn't make it happen.

"The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit," Jesus said to Nicodemus (Jn. 3:8)

And here we are, as Peter said to the crowd in Jerusalem:

This is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. (Acts 2:17)

Ours are visions and dreams of the reality of God, that are not overcome or discouraged by the divisions and brokenness of the world. Visions and dreams that belong to all the people, and bind us together.

Here is a vision from yesterday. Six young people from the confirmation class (who will be confirmed next Saturday at the cathedral), and four adults (their teachers and mentors) went into D.C. for Samaritan Ministry's "Urban Experience." We heard about the work of Samaritan Ministry, which is supported by a partnership of area Episcopal churches, including Redeemer.

We learned that ministry goes beyond giving stop-gap assistance, to helping people make real changes in their lives. We heard clients, on a video, talk movingly of the respect they are shown at Samaritan, how much it has meant to them that the staff and volunteers always treat them with dignity. These are people who have been truly down, and out: homeless, jobless, addicted, with criminal records and jail time; people who are nothing, or less than nothing in the world's reality.

What we saw and heard was the witness of the Church to the reality of God, that is more real, more powerful than the world's broken down reality ever was or ever will be.

I offer you the prophetic act of those six kids and four adults serving lunch to the guests at Loaves and Fishes. Those teenagers who, not surprisingly, had started out sleepy and a little taciturn (no doubt wondering, *Why are these grown ups dragging us out on a cold, wet Saturday morning?!*) were transformed by the opportunity to serve what looked like well over a hundred, maybe two hundred hungry, not always mellow people, in the basement of St. Stephen and the Incarnation.

Our kids were respectful, calm, kind, and worked hard. They got it. They saw the reality of our harsh, unjust world; and they saw the reality, the truth and hope of the Spirit in the Church. What they have received here, what they have received in their families, they shared there.

What is given is given to be given away, for the healing of the world in the healing of the ones whom the Spirit puts in our path.

On this day when we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit, by water and the Spirit, we baptize Emma, Nicholas and Timothy. And we renew our own covenant of baptism. The world may not make much progress toward peace or greater fairness in their lifetimes. Though I did recently hear a hopeful report on the "millennial" generation, who are said to have a high level of concern and commitment to the common good, so maybe there will be progress in their generation.

But however the world responds, in time, to their leadership, today, even before two of them can walk or talk, they step into the 2000-year long company of those who have received the power of the Holy Spirit in baptism.

Baptism is their commissioning, and ours, their ordination and ours, to be God's prophets, to see visions and to dream dreams of the reality of God; and to make them visible: the healing, reconciling fire, wind, breath of the Spirit, in the world.

What has been given has been given to be given away.

“Creator; Christ; Spirit; Spirit in the world.”