

Acts 2:1-21

Day of Pentecost

May 27, 2007

Wind.

Flame.

A lightning strike in a dry forest. One tree ablaze, then another, flames racing, leaping – fanned to white hot heat by the winds. Nothing is safe – no creature or home – wind and flame conquer all. All the old is fuel for the fire – turned to smoke and ash like a burnt offering. The earth is being cleared for new life to begin.

Is it like that when God's Spirit comes?

David told me that in years past this new guy would have been prey.

That is the word he used – prey. P-R-E-Y. Like the antelope a lion devours – the sparrow a hawk grasps in his talons.

He was speaking about the 23 year-old who was new to the prison, just starting out on a ten year sentence. He told me, "A few years ago he would have been prey, someone to take advantage of. But now I think of him like he is my son."

Why the change? The Spirit of God has been at work in him, making him a disciple of Jesus. All the old is being burned away – new shoots of love and kindness are breaking through the blackened soil of his heart.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues as of fire appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Wind and flame.

The blaze spilled out of the house, out into the streets. People heard them speaking in the native language of each person. Like what happens at the United Nations but without any translators. Every word understood by everyone but not a common language – instead the Holy Spirit meeting each person where they were.

Wind and flame.

One thing I have learned to expect when I ask people about their faith in Jesus – there is not one answer that is shared by all – nor even a few answers. God has continued to meet people where they are – the Holy Spirit has planted faith in more ways than I can number. The Word of Jesus comes to us in language that makes sense to us and we believe.

I asked David, the man in prison whom I visit, how Christ reached out to him. “It is a mystery,” is all he can say. The wind and the flame of the Spirit led him to the scriptures, not in a church building but in a prison like all the other prisons that have been his home for more than twenty years. For a couple of years now he has been growing in faith and in witness to Christ and in loving service.

The world has never seen another moment like the moment the Luke tells us happened on that day of Pentecost. Never again in scripture is speaking in tongues described as a miraculous speaking in the native language of another. But Pentecost has been happening whenever the word of Jesus is told and the Holy Spirit meets people where they are.

I once heard a sermon about what happened in the upper room between the day when Jesus ascended and the day of Pentecost. It was a period of ten days. Luke tells us that they were in that room praying. Together praying. The twelve disciples and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Jesus’ brothers and other women were together praying. When Jesus ascended they did not rush out to tell the news – they prayed until the time God would send the Spirit.

Some of you have been praying for someone you love – praying that the wind and the flame of the Spirit would come to your loved one. You pray that a wildfire would consume all the old and that new shoots of faith and love would break through the blackened soil of your loved one’s heart. Some of you have been praying for years, for decades, even more.

Some of you have been inviting neighbors, acquaintances to gather with us here. Lately more of you have been telling me of people you have invited. It may just be that the invitation you give – the quiet listening to another you do, is the answer to a mother’s prayer for wind and flame of God’s Spirit to come.

Keep on praying, keep on listening, keep on inviting and telling of Jesus. The Holy Spirit is meeting people where they are. Amen.