

Pentecost Sunday

Romans 8:14-17
Acts 2:1-21

May 23, 2010

There are times when I like nothing better than a good wind. A gentle wind, that blows lightly across my cheek; a strong wind, that musses my hair and ripples through the grass; a fierce wind, that whips the waves of Kempenfelt Bay into a frenzy of rolling white caps. In truth, I love the wind! But then I have never lived through what the people of Barrie lived through on May 31, 1985; never stood at my window and watched as my neighbour's huge maple tree went flying by; never known what it is to have a lifetime of work wiped out in the 30 seconds it took for the tornado to rip through this area. Yesterday I googled "Barrie Tornado" and found myself watching a 14 minute documentary, introduced by Barbara Frum, that was shot in Barrie during the first 48 hours following the tornado. I was shocked by the pictures of the devastation on Crawford St.; devastated at the sight of a bereaved mother combing through the wreckage of her home, looking for photographs of her lost son. I imagine that for those of you who lived through that experience, the sound of a roaring wind is not a sound that you love. In fact, it probably fills you with dread.

Certainly the disciples in to-day's passage were filled with dread when they heard the wind surround and fill the house where they were. They were already terrified. The Roman authorities had been hunting down disciples of Jesus. When they were found, they were arrested and often sentenced to death. In to-day's text, we are told that the disciples were hiding in a small house, terrified of being caught. Into the midst of their terror came the roar of a mighty wind. The wind filled the whole house. There was no-where to run. There was no-where to hide. I imagine that for one brief moment, they must have thought that this really was the end: the end of their world, and the end of their lives.

Whenever I think of this part of the Pentecost story, I am reminded of an old saying that goes something like, "Just when you think that it can't get any worse, it does!" Who amongst us does not know the truth of this? Who amongst us hasn't had the kind of day that only goes from bad to worse? We start out the day by, say, tripping over the dog, spilling our coffee all down our pants and then getting to work late because we couldn't easily find the only other pair of pants that weren't in the laundry hamper. The boss is grumpy, the computer freezes and the fax machine refuses to fax. We rush out to our 5:30 hair appointment, only to discover that it was at 5 o'clock. We race home to start supper only to find that someone put the empty milk carton back into

the fridge and there is no milk for the casserole we've almost finished making . And on it goes! We've all had days like this. But some of us have also experienced the truth of this saying in a much more serious way. Two years ago I had a phone conversation with a dear friend whose husband was dying of cancer. Several days earlier, he had been told that there was nothing more they could do for him. My friend said to me, "Every day, it gets worse. Yesterday the whites of his eyes turned yellow. To-day, his legs started to swell. Just when I think that it can't get any worse, it does."

Life can be very difficult. We all know this. The Pentecost story tells us this. But it also tells us more than this. The Pentecost story also tells us that it is precisely in these darkest moments of our lives that the Spirit of God breaks in. Two thousand years ago, the Holy Spirit broke into the lives of those terrified, despondent disciples. Their experience of the Spirit was so powerful it was as if they had been set on fire with energy and new life. They left the house. They walked through the streets of Rome. They told their stories of faith. Many were arrested, and tried, and put to death. Through this witness of courage and self-sacrifice, the church was born; a church so strong that for 2000 years, the Gates of Hell have not prevailed against it.

An old proverb says : "It is always darkest before the dawn". Today's story tells us that the Holy Spirit comes like the dawn into the dark places in our lives. This is one of the promises of Pentecost. Another, is that if we open ourselves to the power of the Spirit, we as a church will be on fire with our faith; passionate about our ministry; involved in some focused way in acts of justice and mercy. A church that is filled with the Spirit is a church that dreams; a church where all the members dare to trust that God is in their midst and that God will lead them forward. In Luke's words:

"I will pour out my Spirit on everyone," says the Lord.
Your sons and daughters shall prophesy.
Your young shall see visions.
Your old shall dream dreams"

All of us here: young, old, middle-aged: all of us have a part to play in the future of our church. All of us are called to vision and to dream and to trust that through the power of the Holy Spirit, all things are possible. Which, on this 24th of May long week-end, may not be the news we want to hear. For many of us are tired. We are looking forward to the slower pace of summer. We need the slower pace, of summer. I hope that over the next

three months, each of us gets what we need. But I also hope that each of us will carry these words of Luke with us, so that when church life gears up again in the fall, we will be ready for the great, passionate, faith-filled adventure that is to come. May we be ready for the power of the Spirit of the living God to “fall afresh on us,” melting us, molding us, filling us, using us,*

for the glory of God,

and for the building up of God’s church.

Amen.

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*”Spirit of the Living God”, words and music by Daniel Iverson, from “Voices United”
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