



Pentecost, Jen Norton, 2020.

Greetings!

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the word. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days. ~Acts 10:44-48, NRSV

The book of Acts is perhaps the most inclusive book in the Bible. This may be a wild assertion on my part as I did not do an exhaustive scholarly research project to make this claim. However, my read of scripture moving from the Resurrection and the Ascension of Jesus shows him surrounded by a small exclusive group of mostly Galilean Jews who believed that He was the promised Messiah. That was it, just a small group. A mostly monocultural gathering. On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes upon this small group and they share their experience with people attending a festival.

This annual Jewish festival is known as Pentecost. The Festival of Pentecost celebrates the first fruits of the annual wheat harvest. After Peter preached and the disciples shared their experiences, they were totally caught off guard with the response of the people. The disciples went from hiding in an upper room to being astounded when the Spirit breaks through. They become the first evangelists of the faith without the physical presence of Jesus (Acts 2: 1-21). We are told that 3,000 people from all nations made a public profession of faith that Jesus is Lord, the first creed of the church (Philippians 2:9-11). They could hear the message in their own language! All of a sudden, the followers of Jesus moved from being a monocultural community to multicultural!

Acts 10: 44-48 talks of the early church, as recorded by Luke, with a window that looks upon that small monocultural group being shocked that the Holy Spirit could come upon Gentiles. As you can read in The Acts of the Apostles, it is a learning process. While it seems parochial on the one hand, how different is it from much of what is separating us today in our culture? The Holy Spirit can come upon...? Who? You name the group, you name the individuals. Had it not been for the influence of the Holy Spirit it is likely that the followers of Jesus would have ended up as a footnote in history. The Holy Spirit, by engifting the lives of believers, shaped Christian community to be both multicultural and multinational at the same time.

Today, pronouncements on Nationalism or Monoculturalism, which seem to be pervasive in some parts of our culture are simply non-Christian, and should be called out. But they are not called out, because of fear. This is not new of course. Fear is evident in the early Christian narrative and it is all around us today with the telling of lies, half-truths and the mischaracterization of scripture for political purposes. In Christian tradition scripture, Rome was called out for it's traumatic use of force to beat the people into submission, while at the same time creating a lie based on the notion that the King, Caesar - is god. An entire theological system was created around this lie for the purpose of power. Rome used marginalization, nationalism and ethnic supremacy as the basis for its legitimacy and its religion. These things stand in stark contrast to a creative God who "spoke" diversity from the beginning (Genesis 1-2). And God continues to speak in this post-resurrection season. Remember the Disciple I Bible Study: Genesis-Exodus, Luke-Acts? It makes sense that the creation of the world through Christian tradition teems with diversity! Maybe it's time we all take that study again.



Holy Trinity, Troitsa, 1427.

In those corners of our culture where nationalism and white supremacy is pervasive, a freshening movement of the Spirit is needed to convert and correct these thought processes and practices. The Holy Spirit "... intercedes on our behalf with words too deep..." (Romans 8:26-27) and changes our trajectory from self-centeredness to a fullness of prayerful living that is transformational. Living in the transformational Christian context is decidedly multicultural.

Let me give you an example from right here in our district. Six years ago Forest Chapel UMC pastor, the Rev. Dr. Kabamba Kiboko, began a process of reaching out to multiple communities of people. The communities she reached out to include city council, the police department, the fire department as well as immigrants in the community. Herself a Congolese clergywoman, Dr. Kiboko knows the importance of developing relationships as the way to live in the Spirit.

Forest Chapel was founded 65 years ago as a monocultural community in a monocultural suburb of Cincinnati – Forest Park. Reaching out took years to build, and there were times it was hard. But with each relationship a bridge was constructed, and new life was breathed into a declining church. During this pandemic year, Forest

Chapel received 77 Professions of Faith from Bhutanese and other immigrant persons and community persons. A robust internet ministry and house churches in Bhutan watch worship each week. How did this happen? Word spread from the Bhutanese here in Forest Park and people watch in droves. People gather in homes and pray, sing, and fellowship through the worship going on at Forest Chapel UMC. This rapidly growing ministry overseas has swelled to nearly 1,000 people every week! And the attendees are not just surfing, they stay for the whole worship service.

This is an example of a church that saw in amazement the Holy Spirit at work and moved from a monocultural church to a multicultural church. Forest Chapel is now reaching more people weekly than it did when it was a monocultural church. It is the work of the Holy Spirit.

There are other exciting ministries happening in the ORV as well. There is no magic in the proclamation of the Gospel - it is only achieved through the power of the Holy Spirit. And inspired by the Spirit, there is no substitution for the hard work of relationship building between people. One last thing to grasp is this - you must get out of the way of the Holy Spirit to be blessed by the Holy Spirit.

Let me close by asking a few questions-

- When did you last experience the Holy Spirit in your life? In your church?
- What was happening? Were you amazed?
- How did you or your leadership get out of the way of the work of the Spirit?
- As we prepare for Pentecost 2021, will you tune your senses to be inclusive to the Spirit's Call?

Peace,



Rev. Dr. Todd D. Anderson, West Ohio Superintendent
Ohio River Valley District, United Methodist Church

