

Pentecost Sunday – Bob Munshaw

Acts 2:1-21; Psalm 104:24-34, 35b; Romans 8:22-27; John 15:26-27, 16:4b-15

We've had some interesting conversations about the Holy Spirit around the Munshaw household over the last 6 months or so. What does the Holy Spirit do? What does it mean to be filled with the Holy Spirit? What is it to be baptized with the Holy Spirit? Should we expect the gifts of the Spirit today in the same way that they were experienced in the early church? I'm pretty sure that I'm not going to answer all of those questions this morning, but on this Pentecost Sunday 2012, our Scripture passages do direct us to reflect on the third person of the Trinity and the Holy Spirit's work in the world ... in the church ... and in our lives.

Our gospel ... the words of John 15 and 16 are part of a long prayer of Jesus for his disciples. The disciples didn't quite know it yet, but their world was about to be turned upside down over a chaotic two-month period. There was soon to be: the shock of Judas' betrayal ... the trial and crucifixion ... hiding in the upper room, hoping not to be discovered and killed. There were the wild stories of the resurrection, the joy of seeing Jesus alive again, the few weeks of meals shared together again, and suddenly that was it!! Jesus was saying a few last words and disappearing into the sky.

So, even if the disciples didn't understand it all, this talk that Jesus was having with them this prayer that he was praying over them, these were words to help prepare their heads and their hearts for a day when he would no longer be with them in the flesh. He knew that they were going to feel as if all their hopes in Him had been in vain ... that they were going to feel like He was abandoning them at just the time that they needed Him the most. Listen again to his words from vs. 6-7.

“6. But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your hearts. 7 Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you.” But what does it mean that the Holy Spirit is with us?

I think one thing that it means is that we live our lives with a little more respect ... and a true sense of who God is and who we are. Let's not mix up fear and awe, but let's also realize that they are quite connected. Maybe we need a story to help us with this:

A number of years ago, I went camping in the Canadian Rockies with my buddy – pastor Daniel Graham. On the way there, Daniel told me stories of his bear hunting experience. He told me of how the bear really came after him when it saw him hiding in the tree

Then, we talked about the fact that it was fall, but we didn't know whether or not the bears were in hibernation or not. We chewed on that for a little while, and I think that Daniel was having a little fun with me, because he lived in bear country, while we didn't see many bears in our part of Saskatoon. We talked a little more about the recent Bear attacks that had been occurring recently.

So we arrived, and got set up ... ate a little supper and cleaned up well around the camp site. All was well, until about 2:30 or so in the morning when a bear woke us up. Ok, I didn't actually see the bear ... but I'm sure that it was a bear, because it was making bear noises. I woke Daniel up, so that he could help me confirm that it was bear noises. With a combination of bravery and stupidity, we wandered out of the tent and had a look around. The bear must have known what was coming, because it hid. Still, I felt better and fell back asleep, but alas for Daniel. I'd wired him up so much with my fear, that he didn't fall back asleep for a good while.

Now whether there was a bear or not that night, it is good to have a healthy respect for the beast ... to take precautions ... to make sure that, at the very least, I am in good enough shape that if it came down to a foot race, that I could outrun Daniel. Understand, I didn't have to outrun the bear, just Daniel.

Fear ... a touch of awe in recognizing who the bear is, and who I am -Do we have a healthy respect for the Holy Spirit, not fear like Daniel and I had for the bear, but awe out of a growing understanding of who God is and who I am.

In John 3, we read Jesus words that the Spirit moves as he wishes and we cannot tell from where he comes and where he is going. And that is how it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. In Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit comes, things get a little crazy and exciting. There is the rush of a violent wind. There was what looked like tongues of fire resting on the heads of the Christians. They suddenly had the ability to speak in other languages. We have read the story many times over the years, and we know that familiarity can make a story seem boring, but let me tell you that if the doors suddenly swung open and flames started making the rounds and Matthea could suddenly speak fluent Swahili and Cathy broke out in Chinese and Tim Wayman was suddenly speaking fluent Canadian, we'd all suddenly be quite filled with fear or awe.

But that awe should also be formed with a realization that the power of God in his world and in our lives is mediated through his love. This is important for us to remember. God is powerful, but also love us deeply. The 104th Psalm describes the creating and sustaining power of Spirit. Even in a world marred by the Fall, if we will but open our eyes and look around us as the Psalmist has, we could be caught breathless at the beauty and wonder of the created world. But as with the story of Pentecost, we can too easily take it all for granted.

In the Romans text, which was read earlier, Paul, too, is reflecting on the work of the Spirit. Paul builds on this reality that we are broken people in a fallen world. We are living in hope for what will one day be, but we also need the help of the Holy Spirit today. We don't always ...

maybe we don't often know how God will work in our lives and in our situations, but Paul writes to have patience and hope in God, because in the meantime, God is helping us in our weakness. ... even helping us to know how to pray. Whether or not we want to admit it, this is help that we need. Because humanity = fraility.

The story is told of a farmer who was sitting on the front porch one summer evening when a newspaper boy came to deliver his paper. The boy noticed a sign on the porch which read, "Puppies For Sale." He got off his bike and said to the farmer, "How much do you want for the pups, mister?" "\$25, son." The boy's face dropped. "Well, sir, could I at least see them anyway?" The farmer whistled and in a moment the mother dog came bounding around the corner of the house tagged by 4 cute puppies, wagging their tails and yipping happily. At last, another puppy came straggling around the house, dragging one leg behind. "What's the matter with that puppy, mister?" the boy asked the farmer. "Well son, that puppy is crippled. We took her to the vet and he took an x-ray. The pup doesn't have a hip joint and that leg will never be right."

To the amazement of the farmer, the boy dropped his bike, reached for his collection bag, and took out a fifty-cent piece. "Please mister, I want to buy that pup. I'll pay you 50 cents each week until that \$25 is paid. Honest I will, mister." The farmer said, "But son, you don't seem to understand. That pup will never be able to run or jump. That pup is going to be a cripple forever. Why in the world would you want such a useless pup as that?" The boy reached down and pulled up his pant leg, revealing a brace, holding a poor, twisted leg. "Mister," the boy said, "that pup is going to need someone who understands him to help him in life!"

It is a fact that each one of us has been broken and crippled by our own choices and by the choices of others. We live in a fallen world. Death, disease, sorrow and sadness are sometimes, and maybe often, our companions. As with the disciples, we need not just a word of hope .. we need real help ... we need not just encouragement to hang in there, we need strength that is beyond us, and as we return to the gospel, we hear that this is what Jesus is promising to his disciples and to us.

Last week, we were reminded that God's purpose is not to take his followers from the world. When people become Christians, they are not beamed up to heaven like characters in some Star Trek movie. No, as Dr. Reinhard reminded us so powerfully last week, we have parts to play in the world around us ... even in our humanness.

Frederick Buechner has a way of helping us think about things. He writes:

"Like its counterparts in Hebrew and Greek, the Latin word spiritus originally meant breath (as in expire, respiratory, and so on), and breath is what you have when you're alive and don't have when you're dead. Thus spirit=breath=life, the aliveness and power of your life, and to speak of your spirit (or soul) is to speak of the power of life that is in you. When your spirit is unusually strong, the life in you unusually alive, you can breath it out into other lives, become literally in-spiring.

He continues ... “God also has a spirit – is Spirit, says the Apostle John (4:24). Thus God is the power of the power of life itself, has breathed and continues to breathe himself into his creation. In-spires it. The spirit of God, Holy Spirit, Holy Ghost, is highly contagious. When Peter and his friends were caught up in it at Jerusalem on Pentecost, everybody thought they were drunk even though the sun wasn’t yet over the yardarm in Jerusalem. They were.”

Our optional Old Testament reading for this morning was Ezekiel 37. It is the vision that God gave to Ezekiel of the valley of dry bones. Listen to the word from the Spirit of the Lord beginning in v. 11

11 Then he said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the people of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’ **12** Therefore prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel. **13** Then you, my people, will know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. **14** I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.’”

There is physical death which comes to each of us at some point, but we can also taste the death of our spirit ... a death that comes to us as our world gets turned upside down in one fell swoop, or a death that comes as we experience one disappointment or failure after another ... a death that comes when we feel abandoned, when others have given up on us, when we have given up on ourselves, and when we reach the point of feeling that even God has given up on us.

This is why the story of Pentecost needs to be celebrated in the church. We do not need to be trapped in discouragement, defeat and despair, because as Christians, we have the Holy Spirit to teach us, to guide us, and to (big breath) inspire us, or breathe new life into our hearts. This is the good news of the gospel.