

Sermon for Pentecost – June 12, 2011 – “Now What?”

Text: Numbers 11:24-30; 1 Cor. 12:3-13; Acts 2:1-21

A man from the South had gone up north on vacation. Being a regular churchgoer, Sunday morning found him visiting a nice big church in New England. His first impression was how quiet and subdued the service was. At one point during the sermon, the preacher said something that the man really agreed with. “Amen!” yelled the man loudly. As the entire church turned to stare, an usher ran up to the man. “Shhhhh!” he said sternly. “You can’t do that here.” But I’ve got the Holy Spirit!” the visitor explained. “Fine,” said the usher. “But you didn’t get it here.”

Gathered from outside in the world, we have come. From different places with varied experiences and backgrounds; young or old, member or visitor – we’ve gathered together for worship. We’ve gathered to come and encounter our Living God. We’ve gathered to hear again – or maybe for the first time – the story of the mighty wind and tongues of flame of the Holy Spirit’s arrival on Pentecost. Not much different than the disciples, we find ourselves all together in one place this morning. The disciples couldn’t have expected the rush of a violent wind while huddling in the safety of a single, locked room. Not outside the room, but **inside** – a wind indeed blew in their midst. Tongues of flames rested on them – the gift of the Holy Spirit given. Like them, God has gathered us this Pentecost not just to remember but to be surprised.

What do we expect? Will we be surprised this day? Can we?

The Holy Spirit comes blowing anew on us today, too – through our cynicism, our fear and our apathy – as we gather to welcome new members and confirm a group of our young people. As I mentioned earlier – the same Spirit who empowered the disciples to preach the good news of the risen Christ 2,000 years ago is the same Spirit who empowers these ten persons to make their public confession of faith this morning. At its essence – in its purest form – Pentecost is a time of renewal. There is – hopefully – a renewed focus on our faith – a renewed sense of what’s possible – a sense of empowerment. A renewed purpose, greater hope – a deeper trust in God. A renewed sense – that somehow, someday – we really might be able to figure this all out and become the people – the church – that God has called us to be. Thus, the Spirit blows anew on all of us today.

What do we expect? What if it came to us the same way it came to the disciples? What would we do? I’d imagine that we all have those moments in our lives when we ask: “But, now what?” We wait a long time to do something – and then finally do it, only to find ourselves saying, “Well that was great – but, now what?” We go through four years of high school, or college – we manage to make it through those stressful days of finals and impending graduation; finally putting on the mortar board caps and gowns, get our diploma and say, “Whew, glad that’s over – but, now what?” We reach the milestone birthdays like 16, 21, 30, 50, 75 – only to ask ourselves the very next day, “okay – but, now what?”

We ask this question even in our darkest days.

When a loved one dies, when a marriage or friendship breaks up, when the diagnosis is cancer – “But, now what?” We ask it because something so life alternating has taken place that it’s changing the present and profoundly shaping our future. We’re changed and transformed – even if we don’t even know it – or acknowledge it. Or we just know the moment that just passed was – or is – supposed to change us. I think this was the case

for the disciples in following Jesus, especially in the days after his death. On their Jewish calendar, this day was marked as the fiftieth one from Passover – a day to celebrate the harvest and the giving of the Law. Perhaps, the disciples were remembering where they were at Passover. After following where Jesus went, going where he ministered, sitting with those whom he made company – the disciples remember being at dinner with Jesus eating the Passover meal in the same room they now find themselves. It was a treasured moment in their shared life together. But, it was also the moment that set off the course of Jesus’ last days. Betrayal, trial, conviction, sentence, death on the cross. The rapid chain of events would surely leave the disciples the day after Good Friday asking the question, “But, now what?”

Then, Resurrection at Easter – Jesus bearing the marks in His hands and side – comes and meets them in this same room. And, for forty days he appears to them until Ascension, when He disappears from their sight. With their faces in the clouds, we can hear the disciples ask, “but, now what?” They go back to the same four walls they’ve known since Passover – just as Jesus told them – and they wait. They wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit. “But, now what?”

Then a rush of wind, tousled hair and clothes, furniture shaking, dust and dirt blown about – tongues of fire resting on them – just like that the promise of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled. No longer mere disciples – mere students – these new apostles – messengers – are called out in the street speaking languages they’d previously not known. Not because they’re drunk – filled with new wine – but because they’re filled with the Spirit, they testify to the deeds of God’ in Jesus Christ. Peter preaches. Three thousand are baptized. The Day of Pentecost...But, now what?

Dr. David Lose warns of preaching about Pentecost as mere memorial – or commemoration – saying that: **“Few holidays present themselves as ripe for nostalgia as Pentecost – after all, weren’t these the glory days of the church?”**

Lose goes on to say that: **“preaching Pentecost primarily as a remembrance of the past... unintentionally numbs us to God’s ongoing work to love, bless and redeem this world right now, right here, through us.”** He drives home this point in a video called “It’s Pentecost.”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rmweXyEoBw>

So, it’s Pentecost, – but, now what? Have we come expecting to be filled again? Rekindled with the Spirit’s Fire? Have we come expecting people to speak in tongues? Do we hope to hear prophets prophesy? The old to dream dreams and the young to see visions? Not some 2,000 years ago, but **now** – for the church **today**?

In many ways and for lots of reasons – I believe we’re experiencing a “but, now what?” kind of a moment in the church. The rushing winds that we know feel more like ones of change and they’re more than a little scary:

- the postmodern – the “all viewpoints are valid, reality is a social construct” – wind
- the post-Christian – the “we’re no longer the dominant religion” – wind
- the relativist/pluralistic – the “there’s no absolute truth” wind
- The discontinuous – the “sudden, disorienting change – wind

It’s Pentecost – but, now what? Well, for the disciples – upon receiving the Spirit – they get up and leave the safety and comfort of that Upper Room they’ve known for 50 days.

They go out in the world around them – to a street corner in Jerusalem. You see, the rushing wind of Holy Spirit doesn't drive our problems, or our current reality out – it drives **us** out. It drives us out into the world to preach, to teach, to love, to serve, to witness to the love that God has for us in Jesus Christ. It does so in a language understandable in the context to which God calls us to carry it and with whom God calls us to share it.

It's Confirmation Sunday, right Confirmands? In a few minutes, we'll invite you to stand and confirm your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. We'll mark you with oil to remind you that God pours out the Holy Spirit upon you, too. You will become disciples of Jesus, ministers to God's people and full-fledged members of this church. "Okay," you may ask, "but, now what?"

Will you follow where the Spirit leads you?

Will you share your faith with others?

Will you show kindness to someone?

Will you speak out against something you know is wrong?

Will you make a visitor to our church feel welcome?

Will you serve those who have less than you do?

Will you be a friend to someone who has no friends? Who everyone else makes fun of?

Will you be an active, full participant in the life of the church – offering your energy, intelligence, imagination and love to others in the church?

Will you – in your own way – help lead the church?

Letting no one look down on you because of your youth, will you set an example for others in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity?

Will you teach us to speak a new language of love so that we can share Jesus with those who have yet to hear and know?

Will you remind us of a time in our own lives when faith was new and our hearts were open to the notion that with God all things really are possible?

It's Pentecost.

The Spirit is being poured out indeed upon these young people saying yes to Jesus for the first time. But ours is a generous God. The Spirit is being poured out for all of us, too. The Spirit empowers us to go out in the world seeking to answer the question – but, now what – as we live as renewed people of faith – people with so much Good News of God's grace and love that we can't help but share it. The Spirit is pushing us out the door, equipping us with all the gifts we need to tell of the mighty deeds of God.

It's Pentecost – but, now what? Time to find out. What's next is up to you.

Thanks be to God. Amen.