**June 8, 2014 – Feast of Pentecost**

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We’ve all heard about the Holy Spirit coming upon the disciples like a mighty wind at Pentecost. In fact, we heard it again today in our reading from Acts. The Holy Spirit is often associated with wind or breath. In Greek, the word for Spirit is “*pneumatos*,” from which we get words like pneumatic and pneumonia, and it’s translated as wind, breath, or spirit.

The word “*ruach*” in Hebrew is translated pretty much the same way. We first see that word in Genesis 1:2, “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.” For this verse, I like the King James version better than our NRSV, which says, “…while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.” But they mean the same thing.

Then we see it again, in the prophecy from Joel 2:28 that Peter quotes, “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh…” Those two important words, *pneumatos* and *ruach*, are all over the Bible, as you might expect.

But the spirit is also expressed in our readings today in two other elements – fire and water. Since I talked about fire last year, I’d like to focus on Spirit as water today. I want to read the passage from John’s Gospel again. It’s so short that it went by pretty quickly.

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.'"

Before you ask, as I’m sure you were going to, I don’t know where the Scripture that Jesus refers to here comes from. The reason I don’t know is that no one knows. There are tons of references to flowing water in the Old Testament, but none matches this phrase exactly. This is kind of annoying, because it’s nice to be able to tie things up in a nice scriptural bow to make sense of them.

So what does this passage have to say to us? Well first of all, a little context. The festival being talked about here is called Sukkot. Sukkot is one of the three Jewish festivals, along with Pentecost and Passover where adult Jewish men would have been expected to make the journey to the Temple in Jerusalem. It’s also called the Feast of Booths or the Feast of Tabernacles, named for the makeshift dwellings that the wandering Israelites put up in the desert. This is a joyous week long harvest festival, which also commemorates how God took care of the Israelites during their 40 years in the desert.

Like all Jewish festivals, there is an order to the events. There are special prayers for the first and last days, and in between there is a lot of feasting and partying. But there is traditionally one ceremony that happens on all the intermediate days. On those days, a priest would go to the Pool of Siloam, scoop up water in a golden pitcher, and bring it back to the Temple where he would pour it into a silver bowl next to the altar while saying prayers for rain and next year’s crops.

So on the last day of the festival, after witnessing this ceremony for the past five days, what does Jesus do but stand up and literally yell, “Hey! I’ve got a new kind of water here – living water – and it’s for anyone who wants it!” That must have caused a stir! I can just imagine the musicians falling silent, one by one, except for that one guy who never seems to figure out what’s going on and keeps playing, usually the tuba, and the priest standing there with his pitcher dripping and his mouth hanging open, and all of the people starting to mutter, “Who IS this guy? What did he say about living water?”

Considering that he had snuck into Jerusalem after telling his disciples he wouldn’t be going because the Jewish authorities were out to kill him, this was hardly the way to fly under the radar.

But what does this have to do with the Holy Spirit and Pentecost? Well, in case we hadn’t figured that Jesus was talking about the Holy Spirit here, John helpfully explains it for us. Normally, though, our associations with the Holy Spirit are in the form of receiving. We are sealed by the Holy Spirit at Baptism. The bread and wine are sanctified by the Holy Spirit, sent by God. We are empowered by the Holy Spirit at confirmation. All of these have the Holy Spirit acting upon us, as does the dramatic example of what happened to the disciples in Acts.

But Jesus is talking about the living water, or the Spirit, flowing in, and then flowing right back out again. He’s talking not just about receiving the gifts of the Holy Spirit, but about actually using them.

Have you ever noticed how, when a river has formed a backwater, or when the water is so low that it only moves sluggishly, how nasty that water gets – full of slimy stuff and bugs? It’s the moving water that is the freshest. And just like water in a river needs to move to keep from stagnating, so does the Spirit have to flow out of us – not to keep the Spirit from stagnating, but to keep us from becoming spiritually sluggish.

Notice, too, that Jesus says, out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water. I’m sure the NRSV people had a good reason for translating “*koilias*” as heart, but it really means belly, which in Jewish thought of the time meant the center of emotion. Another way to think of it, that doesn’t bring haggis to mind, might be innermost being. However we might want to translate it, it means that part of us that’s deep inside and communes with God directly. Our center.

So we are filled and sanctified by the Holy Spirit, which then wells up in us and flows out into the world. There is an image that’s found in the very beginning and very end of the Bible, in Genesis and in Revelation. It’s the image of a river welling up in the center of a place – in Genesis, it’s the Garden of Eden and in Revelation it’s the New Jerusalem – and then flowing out in four rivers to bring life to the four corners of the earth. It also appears in Zechariah 14:8, which some scholars think might be the quotation that Jesus uses a variant of in this passage, “And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea…”

This idea of letting the Spirit flow into us, and then out again to water the parched world seems really easy. We just let it happen, right? Certainly, there’s nothing we can do to FORCE the Spirit to flow out of us. However there seems to be plenty we can do to stop up the river and keep all but a little dribble getting out to where it’s needed most.

Probably the easiest way to do this is to stop the flow at the source. In order for the Spirit to flow out of us, we need to be constantly topped up. We need spiritual renewal. One of the best ways to be renewed in the Spirit is to come to the holy table and be fed at the Eucharist. As the repeatable part of our Baptism, this is what it’s intended for. Use it!

There are plenty of other ways, too, such as prayer, coming together as a community, reading the Bible. Any and all of these are ways to keep the incoming valve open at all times. It helps too, to slow our lives down once in awhile to notice if we’re becoming spiritually dry.

And on the other side, be on the lookout for anger, fear, despair, envy, or distraction. These effectively close the spiritual flow control gates and cause our own spirits to feel sluggish and backed up. Throw those puppies open and let the Spirit flow like water out Eden. And especially when we’re struggling with one of those negative states of mind, we can let the Spirit flow over it and wear it down like rocks on the shore.

It’s this spiritual flow that makes all of our mission and outreach efforts make sense. It’s that movement in the Spirit that will attract people to join us and, more importantly, it’s that constant movement, inward and outward, that will bring us true joy and peace. And it’s only from that place of peace that we can truly stand up like Peter did on that first Pentecost, and be absolutely on fire with the power and possibility of God.

Amen.