

## Message for Pentecost Sunday – May 23, 2021

### Acts 2:1-13

It was a summer day more than a hundred years ago and with horror a father realized that his young daughter was drowning. He frantically pulled her out of the water and tried to revive her. The life-saving techniques of the day dictated that a person should try and revive a drowning victim by either squeezing their ribs or else by pumping their arms up and down in an effort to force the water out and suck the air in; Victorian prudishness prohibited mouth to mouth contact. The father tried both of these techniques, but when neither one worked he decided to ignore convention. He opened his daughter's mouth and started blowing air in. Perhaps to his own surprise and certainly to his relief, she came to, and so the concept of mouth-to-mouth resuscitation was born. That father gave his daughter the breath of life and that in a sense is what today itself is all about.

Today is Pentecost Sunday and is the day when we remember the coming of the Holy Spirit. The coming of the Spirit meant many different things, not the least of which being that the world would never be the same again since God had joined his people in a whole new way. I like the way one writer describes it:

‘They are filled with new wine.’

Which is a polite way of saying they were drunk.

Certainly these weren't believers, were they?

Disciples in fact.

And some thought they were drunk.

Maybe we should say bombed since the word has

a sense of power and it was the power of the

Spirit that led them to this behaviour.

The word ‘power’ in Greek is dunamis from

which we get our word ‘dynamite’.

In a sense that is what happened on that Pentecost Sunday so long ago when God ‘breathed’ upon the disciples through the wind and the fire. The power of God was let loose and a powerful charge was set off that shook the foundations of the world. Pentecost was the beginning of the Church, it was Christianity's big-bang as if it were, and the world would never be the same again. Despite the hatred and persecution of the Christians by the religious authorities in Jerusalem,

the new faith did not disappear. Instead it grew ever stronger and spread out into the world beyond Palestine. Then, despite the hatred and persecution by the Roman emperors, the new faith grew even stronger. The faith shook the foundations of the empire until, some three hundred years after the resurrection of Jesus, it even became the official religion of the Empire itself. Even when the Roman Empire fell, Christianity did not. It continued to thrive and slowly but surely what is now the rest of Europe and Russia were Christianized.

At the end of the Middle Ages came the great Age of Exploration. The missionaries followed in the footsteps of the explorers and they were dedicated to winning the world for Christ. These missionaries aren't very popular with a lot of people nowadays and are, with some justification, blamed for introducing new diseases to the natives and being responsible for the destruction of their cultures but nevertheless, their intent was good. Through them Christianity continued to transform the world. Indeed while it may be incredible to believe nowadays, such was the growth of Christianity that some people even seriously spoke of the day coming when virtually everyone on this planet would be a Christian. But that was then, and now is now.

To us today the idea of everyone in the world being a Christian may well sound very naïve and perhaps even a little bit silly. In fact, far from winning the world for Christ, the church now seems to be in a full-fledged retreat. During the past few decades fewer people have been attending worship services on a regular basis, if at all. At one time, and not all that long ago, when the churches spoke about the various issues of the day, people at least listened even if they didn't agree. But nowadays? The prevailing attitude seems to be who cares what the churches think? In many ways the church now seems to be a pale shadow of its former self and it is no wonder that some scholars proclaim that we are now living in the post-Christian era. But while this may be true of North America and Europe, such is not the case in many and perhaps even most other parts of the world. Consider these three questions and answers.

Which language do most of the Christians in the world speak today; English, Russian or Spanish? The answer is Spanish, mainly because Christianity is flourishing in Central and South America. Moving on, where is Christianity spreading the fastest today, in the United States, Africa or South America? The answer is Africa. In fact, statistically speaking, the 'typical Christian' in the world today is a Black African woman. Lastly, what country sends the most

missionaries out into the world today; the United States, the United Kingdom or Korea? The answer is Korea; indeed, while in years past we in the West sent missionaries to Christianize the Third World, they are now returning the favour and sending their missionaries to Christianize us! Truly while we may be living in the post-Christian era here in Canada and the rest of the Western world, this is certainly not the case elsewhere; there power from the Pentecost explosion is still being unleashed. But why is this?

There is no shortage of explanations. One of the most popular is that, generally speaking, we who live in the West are too well off; that far from being a blessing, our possessions and living standards have become a barrier between us and God. We have so much materially that we have lost sight of our dependence upon God. In short, these words of Jesus apply to many of us: "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to get into the kingdom of God". There is I suspect, a lot of truth to this but I also believe that there is another reason.

To return to today's scripture passage, the Holy Spirit is all about the power of God, and as mentioned earlier, the Greek word for power is *dunamis* which is where we get our word dynamite from. Like dynamite, the Spirit and the power of God have the potential to upset us, disturb us and make us uncomfortable. As with real dynamite, the power and Spirit of God are also unpredictable too; we don't know where they will lead us and this can be frightening. We may pay lip service to the idea that God is a living present reality in our lives but the truth is that many of us prefer to confine God solely to the realm of ideas. Though we don't always like to admit it, our attitude when it comes to God is that if you leave me alone, then I will leave you alone. That is why so many of us are uncomfortable with the Holy Spirit; he is simply too unpredictable and that scares us. We may prefer to think that God and Jesus are safely tucked away up in heaven or in our Bibles, but God refuses to be confined. God insists on being involved and so he is.

In the person of the Spirit, God is here and now, present, active, involved and sometimes even challenging. We may sometimes prefer to be left alone but God isn't prepared to do this. God wants to be, and even demands that he be a living reality in our lives. He does so simply because even as he loves us the way we are, he also loves us too much just to leave us the way we are. This however should not perturb us because we should never ever forget that in the Spirit, God

may not just push us and disturb us, it is also through the Spirit that God comforts, guides, strengthens, and reassures us. God, the one who loves us and redeems us, is also the one who is always with us, at all times and in all circumstances, now and forever. And if God is with us and for us, then what do we have to fear?

### **Pastoral Prayer**

Gracious God, we thank you for what it is that we remember today; that with the sound of a rushing wind and what appeared to be tongues of flame, you joined your people in the person of the Holy Spirit.

We thank you not just for what happened but also for what it means; that on that day you called your church into existence to continue your Son's work and ministry here on earth. We thank you that even now through your Spirit you are present and active in our lives and in the life of the world around us. Help us we pray to be open and discerning of your presence. Also, on this day that is your church's birthday as if it were, we pray for her ministry during these challenging times. Grant that she, and we, may be fitting instruments of your will in the workshop of your world.

We pray this day for your presence in the lives of all who are ill, who are mourning and who are hurting.

We pray this day for your presence in the Middle East and all the other troubled places of your world wracked by violence, disease, poverty and natural disasters.

Even in the midst of the pandemic, we give you thanks for this long holiday weekend and what it means for so many people; the unofficial start of the summer season. Even with all the restrictions, people are still out and about and so we pray for the well-being and safety of all, praying too that the summer may be better than last year's.

We ask these things in your Son's name.

Amen.

