6-8/9-19 Empowered by the Holy Spirit Rev. Amy Haines

Acts 2:1-21 Pentecost

When I left for vacation on Tuesday morning, May 28, I had no idea at that time the power of wind unleashed north of us, as tornado after tornado hit Ohio on Memorial Day evening. I had seen the lightning the night before, but in my rush to finish packing, had not realized the greatness of the storm.

While away, I have seen pictures online. While at Annual Conference, several of our pastors from the affected areas used the image of a war zone to describe their neighborhoods. Even at Lakeside on Wednesday we paused for a tornado warning then later found out three more tornadoes touched down that day across our state.

Even as I heard the stories, even as I had seen the pictures, I was still not prepared for the devastation glimpsed from I-75 as we drove home from Lakeside on Friday. I know that glimpse doesn’t even begin to do justice to the scope of the destruction. Please continue to find ways to serve, give and pray.

Memorial Day showed us the power of destructive wind, especially wind wrapped up in a vortex.

Where I used to live in Northwest Ohio shows the power of harnessed wind, as the flatlands of Pauling and Van Wert counties have become fields of wind turbines, hundreds of them converting wind into electricity that is sent from state to state.

In the humidity of last week at Lakeside, I appreciated the comfort of a light wind, especially the light cooling breeze blowing off of Lake Erie.

There is power in the wind—the power to comfort, the power to create energy, and the power to destroy.

We cannot see the wind, yet we can see and feel the effects of the wind.

What is true for wind is also true for the invisible, powerful, unpredictable Spirit of God. We can feel the presence of the Holy Spirit, and we can see the powerful effects of the Holy Spirit, but we cannot see the Holy Spirit.

It is more than coincidence that the Latin word for spirit “spiritus”, the Hebrew word for spirit “ruach”, and the Greek word for spirit “pneuma” all mean "breath" or "wind" at their most basic linguistic level.

Pastor Stephen White reminds us:

..A better translation for Holy Spirit might be Holy Breath or Holy Wind. So let’s try it: In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Wind. If that sounds weird, it is only because we are used to Holy Spirit instead of Holy Wind. Some of you grew up using the words Holy Ghost instead of Holy Spirit. But Holy Wind is much closer to the reality of God’s third person. … Wind is about movement. Think of standing by the seashore or on top of a mountain on a sunny day with the wind blowing so hard in your face that it makes you squint. Think of how alive you feel in those moments.

—adapted from Stephen L. White, “Holy wind, holy breath of God,”

5-15-05, webscript.princeton.edu-- found in Homiletics 5-11-08

The Holy Spirit of God expects to move us, like the wind, often in unexpected ways. The Holy Spirit of God expects to guide us so that God’s presence is real in the midst of our lives and our ministries. The Holy Spirit of God seeks to revive us so that we are compelled like the first disciples to share our story of a crucified and risen Lord and Savior. We are never more alive than when we are led by the Holy Spirit of God.

Today, as we celebrate Pentecost, we celebrate the Holy Wind of God, the Holy Spirit, God’s gift of God’s presence. We celebrate the birth of a Spirit-filled community of Christ followers on that Pentecost only 50 days after Jesus’ death and resurrection. And we celebrate that we are still called to be led by the Spirit of God into unknown yet faith-filled ways of worship and service, of loving God and loving neighbor.

The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Trinity, the three-in-one expression of our God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the gift of God’s presence with us always, as an Advocate, Counselor, Teacher, Comforter, the one who reminds us of Jesus’ words and God’s ways. The Spirit is the gift of God’s presence that moves us from prevenient grace to justifying grace to sanctifying grace.

On that Pentecost day spoken of in the Book of Acts, the disciples were waiting for the gift of the Holy Spirit promised by Jesus, yet I believe they really had no idea what was to come. Only 50 days had passed since Jesus had been killed then risen from the dead, and only 10 days had passed since Jesus had ascended into heaven.

I imagine that even as they gathered together, even as they waited and prayed, the disciples and others who gathered with them were anxious of another Jewish feast day. At the last one Jesus had been betrayed and killed. Would this one be any different? Would they be next?

Once again Jerusalem was teaming with Jews and God-fearers from all over the known world who came together to celebrate the harvest and remember the Law being given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. These Jews gathered as was their custom, even though the language of the Temple was Hebrew and some of the scattered Jews no longer knew the language of their faith.

Work was halted as everyone brought an offering of the first fruits of their harvest, then stayed to celebrate, to party, to worship God in thanksgiving and praise. Pentecost was truly a day of celebration!

Yet *that* Pentecost would be like no other. As the disciples and followers of Jesus gathered together indoors, in fellowship, prayer and worship, suddenly the Holy Spirit of God came upon them mightily. They heard a sound like the rush of a violent wind. They saw what appeared to be tongues of fire resting upon each one of them. Then they began to speak in other languages so that the good news of God’s power proclaimed through Jesus was heard by Jews of many languages.

The Spirit of God powerfully and unpredictably showed up with a mighty wind, tongues of flame, and diversity of language in such a way that everyone in Jerusalem sat up and took notice of this ragtag bunch of Galilean fishermen. These were not men anyone would ever associate as knowing another language. Yet the Spirit worked through these ordinary men to praise the Lord in many languages. They were not drunk! They were filled with the Spirit.

And where one moment the disciples were inwardly wondering if Jesus had all been a dream,

the next moment they were outside in the midst of a crowd once thought hostile, empowered by the Holy Spirit to boldly proclaim the good news of salvation through Jesus.

Imagine if the Holy Spirit would do the same to us today. Suddenly sending us forth to boldly share with all we meet this day the good news of Jesus, in a language they would understand.

If we ate lunch at the Mexican restaurant, they would hear us in Spanish. If we were sharing with children, they would hear us in simple language. Youth may hear the good news more through technology, and senior citizens through relationships with trusted friends. Consider in what ways we could speak to the passions in our community of Jesus’ love and transforming grace.

In reality, the Spirit already sends us out this way each and every day. To share through word and action how Jesus makes a difference in our lives. To share our stories of struggle and hope.

To share God’s transforming grace and ongoing presence. To love others as we have been loved by God.

On that powerful Pentecost day, Peter, the same disciple who had earlier deserted and denied his Lord in public, suddenly he stood and boldly proclaimed his faith in a risen Lord and Savior to all who would listen and all who would believe. Suddenly, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, the number of believers in Jesus swelled in one day from 120 to 3000. Suddenly, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciples found power, purpose and passion that would now take them where few believed they would be led to go.

The Holy Spirit was present with the community of faith that became known far and wide as the church, the body of Christ here in this world.

That same Holy Spirit is present with us here today, church, calling us, changing us, and commissioning us to share the good news of Jesus with the community around us. We, too, are called to be led by the Spirit of God to love God and love neighbor.

Yet, are we willing to be empowered by the Spirit? Or do we think we can do ministry of our own power and strength?

Samuel Chadwick once wrote:

“The Christian religion begins in a New Birth in the power of the Spirit. It is developed under His guidance, and sustained by His presence; but ignoring the Spirit, it becomes a matter of education and evolution.” -thepastorsoworkshop.com

Arthur Moore once stated,

"If the church is to rise to its fullest stature in God, if it is to enjoy the abundant life, if it is to meet all foes in the spirit of triumph, it must rely, not upon its numbers or skills, but upon the power of the Holy Spirit."

-Derl G. Keefer “Experiencing Pentecost” 6-9-19 ministrymatters.com

I confess that there are times when I get so busy that I think I can do ministry of my own power.

However, I have found that without the Holy Spirit, programs may happen but transformation does not.

Our power for ministry, our power for faithful discipleship, our power for loving God and neighbor, all comes from the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Without the Holy Spirit, our efforts at worship, outreach, study and love are futile and meaningless. But with the Holy Spirit, we have a guide, guardian, intercessor, challenger, empowering giver of God’s grace and God’s love that will help us be faithful disciples and effective apostles, those nurtured by Jesus and sent forth by Jesus in order to love and transform our world.

Keep in mind that a church without the Holy Spirit is like a body without breath—dead.

A church without the Holy Spirit is like a wind turbine with no wind—unmoving.

Pastor Ivie Bozeman say the Holy Spirit is also like a car with a dead battery.

She once shared her story:

“In the mall parking lot, I turned the key in the ignition. There was no response. I knew the battery had to be dead. The lights would not come on. “Dead” is a good word for the whole car when the battery is not operating. Without a battery, no lights flicker, no dashboard indicators work. Every element in the whole engine can be in fine working order, but without the battery, the car will do nothing.

I called my husband on the cell phone to come with his jumper cables. While waiting for him to arrive, I thought about how the car without a battery is like a Christian without the Holy Spirit.

Right after Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection, the disciples just sat there, not knowing what to do.

Shortly, my husband arrived with the jumper cables. He hooked the cables between his live battery and my dead one. Soon, power flowed into my car. It could now take me on the rest of my trip.

The same thing happened to the disciples at Pentecost. When the Holy Spirit reached them, they were filled with the power needed to spread the gospel of Christ. The gathered disciples previously had all the equipment needed to do God’s work — all except the power. They needed the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to be connected to the Holy Spirit. Without him we are like my car — a perfectly good engine, a capable driver, but no power.

--Ivie Bozeman, “No action without power,” 10-31-03,

daily.presbycan.ca on Homiletics 4-10-05

Are we willing to be empowered by the Spirit? Or do we allow fear to hold us back from faithfully following where Jesus leads?

At Annual Conference last week, our theme was “Be Not Afraid: Hope.” Yet there was an underlying tension of fear and grief as no one knows what is going to happen to our beloved and struggling denomination in the next year. That fear is translating itself into pastors ashamed to admit to strangers they are United Methodist; that fear is translating itself into congregations who don’t want to start anything new; that fear is translating itself into an inward focus that is contrary to the Gospel.

Bishop Palmer, in his Episcopal Address, said:

“If there was a memo that came from Holy Ghost headquarters that said ‘all of you United Methodists are free to suspend your attention to the primary mission of disciple-making and world transformation until you resolve the challenge of human sexuality,’ signed God, Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, I just need you to know I missed the parchment and I didn’t get a digital version.”

“I am not going to be defined by a single conversation and a single story. And you ought not to be as well.”

Fear often holds us back as individuals and as church communities because when we are open to the Spirit’s power and presence, we know we will be changed. The Spirit might move us beyond our comfort zones. The Spirit might transform our worship songs and our outreach. The Spirit might insist we use our gifts for mission and ministry. The Spirit might change our understanding of what it means to be the church. The Spirit might call us to embrace as brothers and sisters in Christ those who look differently or speak differently or think differently than us.

We don’t know how right now, yet the Spirit will change us—and often we don’t want to change. We are comfortable with the status quo. We are comfortable with a few doing the lion’s share of the ministry. We are comfortable with focusing only on our own needs.

Yet that is not the call of Jesus, and that is not who God created us to be.

So are we willing to be empowered by the Spirit? Are we willing to allow the Spirit to transform our lives?

Since the end of January, I have invited you to pray our Breakthrough Prayer:

*Faithful God, pour out your Holy Spirit on us, to lead us into a new season as your church.*

*Breakthrough what holds us back from living for you in our lives and in our congregation.*

*Give us ears to hear, eyes to see, faith to respond, and the courage to follow where you lead. We ask in Jesus’ name. Amen.*

How has God responded to your prayer? I would love to listen to your stories, in person or via email. How has God opened your eyes to the needs of our community? How has God stirred a discontent within you for things as they are? How is God moving you into a new season of life and ministry? What word is God giving you for our communal life and ministry?

While our official time of praying this prayer is over, I would encourage you to keep praying it, or change it up to what God would have you to pray over the life of our congregation. Pray for one another. Pray for me, and for your staff. Pray for God to continue to guide us into God’s preferred future.

We have some vital ministries to celebrate, where the Holy Spirit is working in our midst!

Yet God is also stirring a new thing among us, and may we be open to new ways to share the Gospel and new opportunities to be in ministry with and for this community, reaching out to all generations.

Are we willing to be empowered by the Spirit?

Today we wear red and celebrate Pentecost. Today we sing *Happy Birthday* to the church, the body of Christ in this world.

Yet, like Easter, Pentecost is not only a day, but also a season. And from now through the end of the church year, from now through the end of November, we are invited to see and experience the Holy Spirit working in the midst of our ordinary lives. We are invited to be empowered by the Holy Spirit in everything we say and do, no matter where we may find ourselves in ministry and service, in work and worship, day after day after day.

This summer, as we continue on in this season of Pentecost, we will examine the power of the God’s gifts in our lives, gifts ranging from hope to obedience to prayer. Gifts that guide us in loving God and loving neighbor. Gifts that open us to the Holy Spirit’s leading in our lives.

So may we celebrate this day, then be open to the Holy Spirit leading us, calling us, comforting us, teaching us and renewing us as we move forward in life and ministry.

Come, Holy Spirit, come. Breakthrough what holds us back. Empower us for ministry in the name of Jesus. Open wide our hearts, to live by faith even in the face of fear and uncertainty.

Come, Holy Spirit, come.