5-22/23-21 When the Spirit Moves Rev. Amy Haines

Acts 2:1-21 Pentecost

“Come, Holy Spirit, come.”

Have you ever prayed those words? Have you ever sung those words?

Did you mean them? Or were they simply words spoken or sung at church?

“Come, Holy Spirit, come.”

Today we celebrate Pentecost, a day that rejoices in the gift of the Holy Spirit and celebrates the birthday of the church. I love the color red that surrounds us today. I love the hymns and songs that try to describe the indescribable Holy Spirit.

And yet, I often wonder—are we ready for the Spirit that we celebrate on this day? What would happen if the Spirit moved among us on this day as the Spirit moved among the first disciples on that first Pentecost following Jesus’ death and resurrection?

Three days after Jesus’ death on a cross, the tomb was found empty, and Jesus appeared to his female and male disciples, alive and resurrected from the dead! For forty days Jesus taught and encouraged his followers, knowing that he could not stay with them forever. Last weekend we heard the story of Jesus’ Ascension, as he returned to the glory of heaven.

Before Jesus left, he encouraged the disciples once more. He empowered them to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth. He also told them to be patient, and wait, and pray, for his presence would come to them through the Holy Spirit.

They listened to Jesus. They prayed and they waited. Then ten days later, on that Pentecost morning, the Holy Spirit moved among them in a mighty way.

The sound of a rushing wind was heard, such as we might hear in the midst of a storm or prior to a tornado.

Tongues of flame alighted and rested on each one of the disciples, like the tendrils of a vine reaching out to each person.

Then this ragtag group of men and women, rural fishermen and ordinary people, began to praise God in other languages so that the Jews and God fearers who had gathered for the harvest festival heard God praised in their native tongues.

No longer fearful of the authorities, the disciples spilled out into the streets, led by the Spirit of God. Now they began to proclaim the good news of a crucified and risen Savior. Now they began to share their experiences of Jesus’ life, death and resurrection. Now they began to announce that the Messiah had come, and salvation was at hand for everyone who believed.

“Come, Holy Spirit, come.”

 When the spirit moves, do we sit up and take notice? Or when the spirit moves, do we cower or hide in fear? When the spirit moves, do we go where God calls? Or when the spirit moves, do we refuse to follow?

When I talk about the Spirit moving, I am not just talking about hand waving and speaking in tongues. I am not just talking about a shouted amen or a risk-taking mission.

The Spirit moves how and where it wants. The Spirit may move in very loud and public ways,

or the Spirit may move quietly within our hearts. The Spirit may move through our prayers and the Spirit may move through our works of service and attitude of welcome.

Notice that I have said **when** the Spirit moves, not **if** the Spirit moves. The Holy Spirit of God will continue to move in this world and in the church.

Our challenge today is to be open to God’s Spirit. Do we really want the story of Pentecost to continue in our lives today? Do we really want to experience that transformational power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and in our church? Or are we careful what we pray for in the church,

fearful that we might just get it? Fear of the Holy Spirit is real. For when the Spirit moves, things change. And how many of us hate change?

The Spirit will move us beyond our comfort zones. The Spirit will insist we use our gifts for mission and ministry. The Spirit will change our understanding of what it means to be the church. The Spirit will call us to embrace the Imago Dei in all of our brothers and sisters in Christ

and work against the systemic issues that hold them back.

Read the stories of the Bible. Every time God’s Spirit got involved, lives changed. Faith journeys took a different path. God’s people had to learn to step out in trust and obedience. Yet they also learned they were never alone and did not have to rely on their own power.

When the Spirit moves in our midst, do we notice and step out in faith, or do we scoff and hide in fear?

Last year, when we celebrated Pentecost still fully virtual for worship, I asked if we were ready to follow the Holy Spirit into an unknown, yet God-filled future. Last year we knew that we had to move forward in faith, because we cannot go back to church as it once was, even in 2019. We did not know then, however, how 2021 would continue to challenge us to trust God as we move into an unknown, yet God-filled future.

I never expected Bishop Palmer to choose me to become a district superintendent. I never expected this congregation would face a pastoral transition this year. I never expected to spend 8 days in the hospital with COVID. I never expected last May when we began to plan for

re-opening in person worship that a year later we would still be struggling with precautions and best practices to care for one another.

I did expect that we would need to renew our vision. I did expect that we would need new servant leaders to step up and serve. I did expect us to struggle emerging from a pandemic.

I did expect us to need to find new ways to be the church to one another and the community around us.

On this Pentecost, may we remember that whatever we face, God promises to be with us. The gift of the Holy Spirit is a reminder that God is with us always, leading and guiding, nurturing and comforting, challenging and pruning, encouraging and celebrating.

God has been with this congregation since our faith ancestors brought the word of God to Springboro as far back as 1822. God has been with this congregation since they became First UMC of Springboro in 1967.

God has been with this congregation as buildings changed, pastors moved, ministries changed,

and households joined and left and grew and passed away. God has been with us in this past year and God will continue to be with this congregation as you face a pastoral transition in a little over a month. Will you trust God’s Spirit to guide you? Will you trust God’s presence that is still with us?

Will you continue to pray our breakthrough prayer from 2019?

*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.*

That prayer is still relevant for our faith journey today!

Sit up and take notice to what God is doing in and around and through you. Sit up and take notice to where the Spirit of God is calling you forward, in service and mission, in compassion and care, in justice and witness. Sit up and take notice to a new season as the church in Springboro.

Then be open to following where the Spirit leads. Deepening relationships with one another.

Building partnerships with the community around us. Worshipping from our hearts, no matter where we find ourselves physically. Connecting with God’s Word.

No matter where the Spirit leads us, we are each called to share with others the love of Jesus,

the forgiving grace of Jesus, and how Jesus has made a difference in our lives.

We are all called to allow the Holy Spirit to push us out of comfort zones in order to share the good news of Jesus through what we say and how we act.

When the Spirit moves, are we willing to follow? When this day is over, are we willing to remember to claim and cling to the power of God with us through the Spirit?

There are two types of danger that can emerge from celebrating Pentecost and the Holy Spirit on this day. The first danger is that we will hear the Word of God and allow the Holy Spirit to turn our lives and church and community upside down through God’s claim and call, leading us into an unpredictable but faithful future. The second danger of Pentecost is that we will hear the Word of God and not allow the Holy Spirit to change a thing.

“When Billy Graham held his historic crusade in Montgomery, Alabama, in the 1960s, he insisted on an integrated choir. The newspaper editorialized that Graham had come to Alabama

and set the church back a hundred years. Graham’s answer was classic: “If that’s the case, I failed in my mission. I intended to set it back 2,000 years.” -Homiletics May 2005, p. 29

I so appreciate the gift of the Holy Spirit, a reminder that God is with us always. I so appreciate the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the fact that we cannot flourish in ministry by ourselves or by our own power. We need the power and presence of the Holy Spirit to truly share God’s kin-dom ways with the world around us.

I am also constantly challenged by the gift of the Holy Spirit, because I know God will not leave me as I am on this day. Some days, I want to change. Other days, not so much. I find that is also true as the church. So will we allow the Spirit to move even in our midst, in our lives, in our congregation?

Gary Sims, a lay person from First UMC in Albuquerque, NM, once reminded us:

The miracle of Pentecost is not simply another story of old. The promise that God will enter our lives with His Spirit is available to all who believe. The experience of the Holy Spirit descending, empowering, and filling our hearts with His love and passion is attainable for each and every one of us. His Spirit fills us with understanding, empowers us to share, focuses our attention on the building of His kingdom, guides us into fruitful discipleship, frees us from our sins, and molds us into the image of God, Himself. Our churches, His church, should be filled with His Spirit.

The church we read about in Acts, the church filled with His Spirit and achieving amazing things,

is the church we should still have today…vibrant and alive in His Spirit. With His wind coursing through our communities of faith, lives will be changed and the world will be filled with hope and love.

 -Gary Sims, First United Methodist Church, Albuquerque, NM

“Come, Holy Spirit, come.”

Move among us. Challenge us. Nurture us. Change us. Remind us we are not alone. Remind us of God’s kin-dom ways.

Remember, the Spirit that moved through that first Pentecost, the Spirit that led Peter and Paul, Lydia and Priscilla, Timothy and John, is the same Spirit of God that moves in our world

and seeks to lead us today.

May we take notice when the Spirit moves and be willing to follow.

May it be so. Let us pray.

Mighty God, who on the day of Pentecost sent the Holy Spirit to the disciples, filling them with joy and boldness to proclaim the Gospel: send us out in the power of the same Spirit to witness to your truth, and to draw all persons to the fire of your love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

-Alternative Prayer Book 1984 according to the use of The Church of Ireland, alt