

Pentecost... 50 days after Easter, in the midst of Spring with Summer on the way! In the Jesus story, Jesus appeared to many of his followers after the Easter resurrection, and at Pentecost time he had finally ascended and told the disciples to wait for a holy spirit of *power* to come upon them before setting out to minister in his name.

Quite frankly, the church feels somewhat “disempowered” these days. There is so much anxiety and fear everywhere, from the fears of a virus, health problems due to aging, mental health problems causing so many young people to turn to violence and killing, refusal of the NRA to agree to more sensible gun laws, intransigence of left and right in our Congress, not to mention fears of some sort of WWII in eastern Europe! We wonder if we can make a difference, or even a dent in our problems!

As people of faith, we remember and rehearse the stories of faith in the Bible, like the Pentecost story, and then we add stories of our own. Peter repeats the promises from the Jewish prophet Joel, that the young will have visions and the old will have dreams. Dreams and Visions! ... Hmmm, at a very personal and individual level, I think this tells us to pay attention to our early morning and late evening quiet times.... OK, we can add napping and day-dreaming as well! The promise of Dreams and Visions reminds us to take a break from the barrage of news and schedules of life, to have regular quiet times without distractions. Many people, of all faiths, say that they have a special place, or room, or even a special chair, where they can be meditative and quiet. For some it might be a special beach or trail in the woods. Henri Nouwen was accustomed to saying that the place, over time, would actually seem to call to us!

Then there is the interpersonal or communal level of Visions and Dreams. When Jesus spoke of the Holy Spirit coming to us, his words can be interpreted as within you and also as *among you*. In this Pentecost story, it says that the disciples were *together* in one place. They had the practice of worshipping together and praying together,

and breaking bread together from house to house. Thus, Visions and Dreams can often come as we inspire one another! We often say that Bible study is more fruitful when done in a group, although there is merit in doing it alone. Think of all the extra insights that come from being with others.

Sharing actual ENERGY can happen in a group. It is often said that enthusiasm is contagious. When the disciples were together, it said that a sound like the rush of a wind was there. And those “tongues of fire” dancing on heads sounds like some sort of electricity... yes *energy*! This is the energy of conviction, the energy of passion, the energy of thanksgiving and praise. One of the most palpable everyday examples of this might be the excitement of fans at a sports game. Hard not to get caught up in the spirit... “Got the spirit? Let’s hear it!” The home advantage of cheering fans can even help some players play way beyond their normal abilities.

So even if we are not feeling like jumping for joy at the words Christ and Paul and Peter, even if we are not feeling the power right now, the Pentecostal power, even if we don’t feel like praying or counting blessings, we can put ourselves in the midst of people who are giving thanks and praise, who are praying for more peace and love in the world, and we can trust some of it will “rub off,” we can trust the contagiousness of faith, hope, love, and joy!

Sure, it is also true that keeping company consistently with people who are negative, hostile, angry, warlike, etc... can be contagious as well. We know full well that so many of the mass murderers out there were spending lots of time in the company of people on the web who were spewing hatred and plotting how to use their prized weapons of war. We know there are “copy cat” shootings. We are indeed known by the friends we keep, and also influenced by them. We need each other to keep us on the path of hope and peace and love! We need the company of others who are “in Christ,” in the Spirit, in God, in this Way of peace.

Pentecost is the *reversal* of the Tower of Babel story! We get the word babble from that Bible story, of all the people starting to speak strange languages so that no one understood one another. The tower of Babel was a story of chaos whose root was in selfish pride, distancing from one another, probably not even listening to one another. But at Pentecost, everyone was understanding one another, because they had found common ground... and that common ground was speaking about the “works” of God, wonders of God... we could even say the *beauty* of God. The common ground was the Thanksgiving and Praise for the goodness or beauty or love of God. I once heard Dr. Bernie Siegal say that leaders in warring countries ought to share photos of grandchildren; how can you want to kill someone who has the same love and joys you have! I think that warring leaders in Congress ought to go on a RETREAT with one another ... to a place with beautiful scenery, beautiful flowers, beautiful music... AND share those grandchildren photos while trying to plan a world for their safe and healthy future!

Speaking of *beauty*, I had the classical radio on the other day in my car, and the announcer said that the next song would be Beethoven’s 3rd Symphony, called the EROICA. I only had about two minutes to my destination, but said to myself I got to hear at least the first movement, so I pulled over and heard the whole first section. Talk about music so perfectly matching a theme... the “Heroic” symphony! I suppose I could say the same for John Williams’ theme for Star Wars, or other great composers who match music with meaning. At a great concert in Symphony Hall or Carnegie Hall, or Belleville Meetinghouse for that matter(!), you can feel the vibrations, the pleasure and joy, as the audience is almost “electrified” by the music. Perhaps that Pentecost long ago was something like that, the Spirit was one of Praising God.

The scripture reports that all were speaking of the “mighty works” or “wondrous deeds” of God; they could also say the

wondrous BEAUTY of our Creator God! Truly the beauty of God can unite people. This is the common ground of Holy Spirit:

- Where there is laughter, like the laughter of good old friends, or the laughter of a child.
- Where there are visions and dreams of peace that are beautiful.
- Where there is wonder and awe for the beauty in this world.
- Where there is enthusiasm, applause for music, cheering for great athletic feats.
- Where there is compassion, even shared tears for inevitable sorrow and loss in life.
- Where there is love professed, such as beautiful words at weddings.
- Where there is forgiveness (everyone loves a story where understanding or softening hearts bring about reconciliation)
- Where there is worship... a shared conviction that the world has more goodness than evil, goodness and mercy that we call God.
- Where there is, renewed energy, renewed love, renewed passion for the good, in spite of sickness or destruction all around us.
- Where a group of people can sing with conviction that surely the presence of the Lord is in this place, even if it seems we are sometimes only planting seeds.
- Where there are legislators who will dare to cross the aisle of conformity, who have the courage to compromise, a true miracle these days.

On Pentecost, we remember those early disciples, Peter, Paul, James and John... who began to minister to their world with new energy, new power, new boldness and courage. We can each individually feel new energy ourselves in various pursuits of passion. And Being together as a community will also continue to renew us in Spirit, as we remember Jesus' very words: where 2 or 3 are gathered in my name, I will also be there in spirit! Amen.