Acts 2:1-18
When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, “Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.

On the great day of Pentecost, the day called “the birthday of the church,” the faithful from all over the inhabited world had gathered in one place and God poured out the Holy Spirit upon them. There was so much energy and power in that place that day that they said it was like the wind was blowing right through them and the air itself was electrified with what looked like fire.

Just as Jesus had said would happen, God sent the Holy Spirit and from that day forward the church was born of water and the Spirit. The church—created by God to be the body of Christ throughout the earth. The church—empowered. The church—opening hearts, opening minds, opening doors, that the world might behold the love and peace and justice of God available for each one and for all.

The Creating Spirit of God, power as of wind and fire, is breathing new life into us and forging us into a new body, the church.

I am making of you a new people, God is saying through all this. Through the Holy Spirit, I am reviving you and unifying you to become one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world. What a gift! God is good, and God wants the fullness of life for all of us, wherever we are, whoever we are.

The newly born church was something quite remarkable indeed, right from the beginning. There is the individual aspect of being blessed and empowered by the Holy Spirit—we know this in baptism and also in confirmation, when individual believers are anointed and blessed and named and called.

But what happened on Pentecost takes it to a whole new level. Pentecost—the word simply means “fifty.” It was fifty days after Easter. The resurrected Christ had appeared to the disciples for fifty days and then ascended into heaven. And now the gift of the Holy Spirit is given—the Advocate, the Comforter, the Creating Spirit, God present with us always to empower and to sustain.

The Spirit came upon them when they were gathered together. Together! We hear that gathered in that place on the first Pentecost were devout believers from every nation. All the languages and cultures of the world were represented. And when the Spirit came to them, lo and behold, they spoke and they all heard and understood, each in their own language. All the divisions of language, culture, homeland and tradition were superseded and made whole. God’s intended beloved community was reunited, the bond of unity restored, the cloth of the fabric of life mended. The church: one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.
What a vision for a time such as ours, in which we are so fractured, divided, and polarized. Do you long for a new kind of unity? Can you envision bonds of mutual respect and caring? Can you dream with God of a world made whole?

While we Christians celebrate this day as the birthday of the church, we share this longing for wholeness, healing and unity with our sisters and brothers as well, part of a much wider circle of love and compassion.

Recently, here in Los Angeles, a truly remarkable and special event occurred. There was a large gathering of Buddhist priests, nuns and teachers representing the diversity of Buddhist traditions and Asian cultures and languages. Followers of every major school of Buddhism were present, thought to be the first such gathering since the tradition was founded over 2500 years ago, really possible only here, in Southern California, here, where they all live. “Everybody is here, all these different traditions and lineages and denominations,” as one said. They gathered for a healing ceremony, healing of the racial tensions that wound us all. One said: we wanted “to move people’s hearts and heal people.”

Another said: “Where there is ignorance, we need wisdom. When there is greed, we need generosity. And when there is hatred, we need lovingkindness.” He said: “deeper ties among people across race, language and national boundaries are the best hope for change…If enough of us are able to recover and touch that wellspring of kinship, we may realize a breakthrough that we’re all praying for.”

The report in the LA Times described the conclusion of the ceremony. “The many and diverse participants passed a long white string among themselves and held it over their shoulders as they processed out of the sanctuary. They entered individually but were now leaving interconnected.”

They entered individually but were now leaving interconnected. Could that not also be said of that first Pentecost, when Christian believers from every nation were gathered together, and all divisions of language, culture, homeland and tradition were superseded and made whole? God’s intended beloved community was reunited, the bond of unity restored, the cloth of the fabric of life mended. The church: one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.

The great Christian theologian of hope, as he’s been called, Jürgen Moltmann, writes that God breathes through the whole creation. And that when we are seized by God’s spirit of life a new spirit of love and life awakens within us. “When we love God, we embrace the whole world” he says. God’s creating Spirit, this spirit of mercy and love that embraces the whole creation, comes to us now, once again, as a spirit of renewal, healing, and life made new.

What a powerful gift to us on this Pentecost in the Year of our Lord 2021. How we need the hope of the Pentecost vision of life and love! The vision of Pentecost still shines. It is energizing the Gospel for all creation. We witness it in the healing hands of those who care for all those afflicted and affected by the pandemic. We see it in the fire for social, economic, and climate justice in faith communities around the world.

The ancient Creating Spirit of God, present from the beginning, made ever new. For whatever challenges we face today, in our time, whatever changes we experience in church and in society, we know that God’s Word is true and God’s promises are sure. The Creating Spirit of God charges us up with the all the power of wind and fire to be Christ’s disciples in the world, for the world. One with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.

Come, Holy Spirit! Come, renew us! Amen.

Notes: