

Today is Pentecost Sunday, the Christian celebration of the birth of the church. It is rooted in Jewish festival of celebrating the liberation of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt.

It commemorates the giving of the law, the ten commandments to Moses as the means to create healthy community.

That time of Pentecost we hear about in Acts 2 happened to be 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus. The text tells us they were altogether in one place.

That has a triple meaning. They were physically gathered in a room, at table with one another, and praying constantly.

They were emotionally together in their confoundment over Jesus' commission and in their waiting for the promised Spirit to be sent.

And they were spiritually together in seeking to know God's plan for them.

They were in community.

Oftentimes we get sidetracked with the phenomena of the loud noise, the tongues of fire, the many languages spoken. We like the drama and the mystery. Sadly, we ignore the long-term result. We overlook the sending out into the world, the hard work of preaching and teaching, the persecution to be endured, the transformation that needs to happen. We think of it as a one-time only event.

Let me remind you of a few aspects of the Spirit.

Spirit was present in the creation stories of Genesis, hovering over and stirring up the waters of chaos.

Spirit was present in the burning bush of Moses, always burning but not consuming, attracting attention and drawing him close.

Spirit was promised in prophets like Joel. I will pour out my Spirit.

Spirit was evident to the writer of the psalms. When you send your Spirit they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.

Spirit spoke to Simeon. Spirit was in king Saul, John the Baptist, and Jesus.

Spirit is not new.

Spirit is communal.

Spirit is represented by wind, breath of God, it is life giving.

Spirit is represented by fire. It is refining, cleansing. The sign of divine presence.

Spirit is unpredictable, uncontrollable, symbolic of transformation.

Spirit blows down barriers that humankind has created.

Spirit empowers prophetic voice.

Spirit equips and mobilizes God's people.

Spirit moves us from survival to renewal.

Spirit is not hindered by social distancing!

Now it's time to do some soul searching together...call them points to ponder on Pentecost...

Though we are not physically altogether in one place, how are we altogether in one place? What holds us together?

What are you missing most today while distancing?

How many of those things are practices of an enthusiastically secular life, and how many are grounded in your faith/spirituality?

Are we skilled at stifling the Spirit, resisting transformation (change), when it threatens our comfort, our routine, our apathy, our complacency, our mobilization?

How do you feel about having the Spirit poured out upon you for the purpose of prophesying, dreaming dreams, having visions? Do these things still happen?

Why or why not?

Do we invite the Spirit today? Listen to the Spirit? Shy away from or stifle the Spirit?

Do we need to receive the Spirit to move from survival to renewal?

I want to challenge you to read my article in the newsletter and spend some time thinking about repentance. That's the first step of refining, getting rid of impurities. Concentrate on yourself, don't get trapped into making justifications or rationalizing or blaming someone else. What areas of your life need repentance?

Then, concentrate on listening. Listen with an ear tuned to reconciliation and restitution. We have to start locally, but we also have to move into global thinking.

I'm suggesting these two things as preparation for the Spirit to be able to work in and through us.

Pentecost should not be glossed over as an ancient festival, or a modern day birthday party. It should be approached with full knowledge of the possibility and power that can be unleashed.

As Annie Dillard said, It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church; we should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares; they should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping God may wake someday and take offense, or the waking God may draw us out to where we can never return.

Now that's a Pentecost I'd like to see!