

## **“God’s Inspired People”**

**Acts 2:1-18**

**Scott B. Martin — May 31, 2009**

Today is Pentecost Sunday, the day we celebrate the beginning of the church universal, the Body of Christ in the world. That is why we have chosen this day to confirm Cody, Larissa, James and Kayce into full membership in the church. As Christians we believe there are direct links between that first Pentecost 2,000 years ago and what we have done here this morning. As Christians we believe one of the most important links is the movement of the Holy Spirit that helps shape the lives of individual Christians and the Church.

This past Thursday, at the lectionary study, Emma Lou Bizer said that in her experience the Holy Spirit is the hardest “person” of the Trinity to understand and explain. When we look at the beauty of creation around us we gain some insight into God as Creator. Jesus was a human being like us, so we certainly have that to get in touch with when it comes to Jesus. But the Holy Spirit, well even Jesus said it’s hard to understand. It’s like the wind. You can’t see it and it comes and goes as it wills. How can one get a handle on that?

What we do know is that when the Holy Spirit is present it is hard to miss. True, some will sense the presence of the Holy Spirit and “know” that something holy and awesome is taking place. Others may well miss this entirely and just think it is youthful enthusiasm, mob hysteria, or as our passage from Acts says, some may think the Spirit inspired people are drunk! The Spirit is rarely without ambiguity, even when powerfully present!

In spite of this ambiguity three things stand out for me in today's passage from Acts. First, there is a universal aspect to the movement of the Spirit. Second, when someone feels the Spirit's presence they tend to share it with others around them. Third, while the Holy Spirit is notable for the newness it brings, often the Holy Spirit brings new life to old religious visions of the world.

One can't miss the universal aspect of the movement of the Holy Spirit on that first Pentecost. After all, we have that long list of countries that encompassed most of the Roman Empire! Then we have the account of "something like" "a tongue of fire rested on" each of the disciples. All eleven of the disciples received the Holy Spirit, not just Peter, and the two Sons of Thunder.

But until this Pentecost I've tended to overlook another group who were blessed by the Spirit on that first Pentecost. It's easy to overlook them, because the Spirit's presence in their lives does not come with pyrotechnics. There are no tongues of fire resting on them; but they are clearly blessed none-the-less. It just goes to show that even a very familiar text can hold new surprises for us and an old dog can learn new tricks of the Spirit.

Acts 2 says that all those who understood what the disciples were preaching heard the message each in their own "native language". Without a doubt the Holy Spirit is what made this possible. That is why they are amazed. They know it is a blessing that has come upon them from outside themselves. It seems the Spirit not only can inspire what is spoken but also what people hear and maybe 2,000 years later, even what people read. Understanding spiritual things is a gift of the Spirit, not a personal accomplishment.

In last weeks issue of Christian Century there was a thought provoking article, "What's Confirmation For?" It's a good question. I don't know if I have ever come up with a fully satisfying answer. The author, Rev. Martin Copenhaver, no longer likes the practice of asking teen age confirmands to write down what they believe and present it to the church during morning worship.

One year the youth gave what he called a "startlingly eloquent" and "accurate witness to the God who is worshipped ...each Sunday." One of the adults present said to him, "After listening to those beautiful statements, God must be feeling especially good today." Copenhaver considered this an absurd thought. He says, *"...as if the God who hung the stars in the heavens and set the earth in its orbit has spent a sleepless Saturday night anxiously awaiting the group's verdict that would be rendered by a group of 15-year olds the next morning."*

Well, put like that I guess Copenhaver is right, but then again I don't image God loses much sleep over what I or Copenhaver will say in our sermons on any given Sunday! None-the-less, I truly believe God is pleased when anyone, youth or adult, struggles with ancient truths and tries to make sense of them for their lives in this world. I truly believe that God is pleased when we speak the truth, with love, as we understand it in that moment. Not that any of us will every fully understand all of God's truth in this life. What counts is a willingness to engage in the struggle to understand God's truth and apply it to our lives. It is in this struggle that God's Holy Spirit comes to our aid, sometimes with "sighs too deep for words." It is also my

firm belief that this struggle is best conducted in the community of others, who are likewise engaging in this struggle.

There are moments when the power of ancient holy visions come true, at least in part. When this happens it is the Holy Spirit that is at work. Notice that on that first Pentecost Peter points his listeners to an ancient prophesy from 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 my Spirit; and they shall prophesy.” (Acts 2:17-18)

I hope you read your Strengthen the Church insert. It tells the story of 18 year old Katie Vivona. She has a passion for her church in Westlake, Ohio, even in a time when overwhelming majorities of young people don't attend church. Her desire to help people has been expressed on multiple mission trips. She has led worship in her church and beyond. She served as the youth chair for her church's Open and Affirming committee. This passion for her church was nurtured both by her local church and through her participation in two UCC National Youth Events. She has definitely caught the Spirit from others and is definitely seeking ways to express that Spirit to others.

On this Pentecost Sunday we celebrate the movement of the Holy Spirit in our individual lives as Christians and in the church. My God's Holy Spirit continue to bless Cody, Larissa, James, Kayce and all of us in their struggle to understand and live out, God's ancient and every new holy truths. Amen.

