

Pentecost Sunday
Mothers Day 5-11-08

Numbers 11:24-30

Acts 2:1-21

John 20:19-23

May the words that I speak and the mediation of our hearts
be acceptable to you O God,
the breath, the wisdom and the Spirit that guides us. Amen.

**Fa yen chong tian siung yao tsing ha loy ho cheung ya zung tai fung choy gao, chung
mon liu ta meng tsau da di oo tze.**

**Ta meng tsan doe bey tsing ling chung mon oon sheng ling tsau tec dae hou choi tsiet
hei bei ka di hua loy.**

Imagine for a moment that my Chinese pronunciation was actually correct, but
more importantly that all of you could understand what I just said. Wouldn't that be
remarkable?

What you would have heard is this:

And suddenly there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind and it filled the entire
place where they were gathered. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to
speak in other languages as the Spirit gave them ability.

We are told that a great crowd of people in Jerusalem heard this thunderous noise and
they gathered to see what was happening. Those assembled were from all over the known
world and spoke many languages, yet they all heard the disciples in their native tongue.

I think it is easy for us to focus on the miraculous side of this story – how tongues of fire
came upon a select group who could then speak fluently to people of different language
groups. But this story is not about the disciples and their ability to communicate. Rather,
the emphasis should be on what God is doing in the larger crowd.

Peter raised his voice and quoted the prophet Joel: “In the last days, God declares that I will
pour out my Spirit upon all flesh ... even upon my slaves, both men and women and they
shall prophesy”.

The message is clear. God is sending the divine Spirit to EVERY person on the planet, not
to just a few chosen people or a special group.

This same theme is echoed in our first reading from the book of Numbers. God took some of the Spirit that was on Moses and put it on a group of seventy elders and as the Spirit rested upon them they prophesied. For some reason two of the elders were not in that group because they stayed back in camp, but when Joshua heard that the Spirit was on them as well, he told Moses to stop them. Moses replied, "Are you jealous?" Wouldn't it be great if the Lord would put the Spirit on ALL the people!

I think sometimes that we as individuals as well as the institutional church do become jealous and we want to hoard God all to ourselves. We try to control the Spirit of God by declaring who can receive it and who cannot. We think that we can define who is in God's club and who isn't. Our attempts like Joshua's to exclude others from experiencing the power of God, is unacceptable as well as impossible.

An inclusive love for "the other" is at the heart of the biblical faith. There is a genuine human need for connection with each other and with the divine. The world continues to cry out for credible actions to show that human community is still possible in the midst of all that divides us.

It is in the midst of these broken conditions of our day-to-day life that God breaks through. A reconciled and renewed creation is the goal of God's mission in the world – and we as individuals as well as the institutional church are instruments in God's mission.

Therefore, the whole ministry of our church including each one of us is to cooperate with God in making the world an inclusive, hospitable place. A home where all of us on the planet will have what we need in an environment where trust, love and justice for all people will reign.

Perhaps the most powerful image of the Pentecost story is not the tongues of fire, but rather the richness of diversity that makes up humanity. The people in the crowd represented different races and spoke many languages. Yet the mission of God is heard amidst the plurality of people's and cultures, for the Spirit of God was upon all of them.

Last year the World Council of Churches reported that there were at least 37,400 different Christian denominations functioning. Many of these groups believe that they have the sole truth of God and that nobody else will be saved. I believe that God has a much more inclusive plan not only for the diversity of Christians, but all the other religions as well as those who practice no religion.

Another version of this Pentecost paradigm is presented in our Gospel. Jesus came silently into the locked house where the disciples were – there was no rushing wind or monstrous sound or tongues of fire - just a quiet appearance.

Then Jesus spoke to those gathered: "Peace be with you." And he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."
This is another aspect of the Holy Spirit.

I view sin here to mean broken relationships with each other, the world and God. Jesus is sending forth the disciples to heal and reconcile the brokenness in the world with the help of the Holy Spirit. But how are they to do that?

I believe it had to start with each one of them. All the grudges, resentments and hurts that they had accumulated with their families, friends, associates and peers had to be forgiven.

They had to let these issues go in order to be reconciled with each other. For if they cannot forgive the wrongs or sins done to them by others, then they would retain and hold the resentments within them and the brokenness would continue. If the disciples couldn't forgive each other, how could they reconcile the world and bring people to right relationship with God and creation?

It is often said, that the one's who hurt us the most, are the people who are closest to us.

In addition to Pentecost, we are also celebrating Mother's Day. How many of us have ever encountered problems, or conflicts with our biological, step or adopted mothers?

I know I have. How many of us still hold on to some of those hurts and pains? Do we continue to experience brokenness in our relationships with our mothers? Or have we forgiven them to revel in the joy of reconciliation?

What do we need to do to be reconnected with these relationships?

What better way to honor not only our mothers, but all women who have birthed, adopted, raised, taught or been in relationship with children than to be reconciled with them. How many women do you know that fit this description? What do we need to do to be reconciled to them?

I have a confession to make. Twenty-one years ago, my daughter was born in late April and I was overwhelmed by the newness of being a father. In my ignorance, I neglected to do anything special to honor my wife on that first Mother's Day that came so quickly. You can imagine that my stupidity did not go over very well! It took a great deal of effort and time to reconcile that mistake!

Today is also a special anniversary for me. It was three years ago on Mother's Day that we held my wife's funeral.

Imagine that - A funeral on Mother's Day.

I didn't realize it at the time, but as I look back on it now, I understand how truly wonderful it was to honor and celebrate Laura's life as a mother and woman of faith on Mother's Day.

The church was packed that day. As I looked around, I recognized every single person in that place and I became aware of the resentments that I still had toward some of them because of perceived wrongs that people had done to me or my wife.

My broken heart melted even more as those hurts and pains were washed away with the tears that I shed. The Spirit of God helped me to forgive their sins against me and my wife. I did not retain them, so I did experience healing and reconciliation.

May all of us gathered here and people all around the globe experience the breath of God in the small, still quiet of our everyday lives.

May the Holy Spirit guide us as we work to reconcile the brokenness within ourselves and each other.

May we forgive rather than retain the sins done to us by others and may we ask forgiveness for the wrongs that we have committed toward others.

May we celebrate God's love in all people and commit ourselves to creating right relationships in our diverse, pluralistic world.

This is the mandate given to us by the risen Christ so that God's mission in the world may be accomplished.

Amen.