May 15, 2016   
Acts 2:1-4   
Freedom to Be Filled

Rev. Kerry Smith   
Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Acts 2:1-4 New Revised Standard Version

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.

I was ordained on 6-6-06 which is almost 10 years ago! My dad who is a Southern Baptist wanted to get me a present so I told him that I didn’t have a red stole. So, he bought me this red stole and then he wanted to know when I was going to wear it. Just on Pentecost, I told him. He looked confused, so I told him, you know, when the Holy Spirit came on the disciples like tongues of fire. It’s the birthday of the church! So, I will wear the stole that you gave me one day, on Pentecost. He didn’t seem to understand why I only got to wear the red stole that he had given me only on one Sunday, but this is the Sunday!

Today is the day that the Christian Church was born in wind and fire to guide us down the journey of this life, to guide us down the roads of this world so that we may lift up the downcast, heal the broken, reconcile what is lost and bring peace where there is chaos. The Holy Spirit is alive in the world in and through us, the disciples of Jesus.

Did you know that in the Middle Ages Holy Spirit holes were made in the ceiling and roofs of cathedrals and great churches throughout Western Europe to symbolize the entrance of the Holy Spirit into the midst of the congregation? You can still see those holes today in European churches as a reminder for us to be open to God’s Spirit.

I love the story of Pentecost because it is this wild story of action, but there are stories of the Holy Spirit’s presence with us every day as we live life with God. It is the story of the nurse who works with dying patients every day. It is the story of the woman who cares for her children with humor, love and kindness even though her husband has left. It is the story of the Girl Scouts who lead their community in starting a community garden in south Dallas. It is the story of the man who finds peace in his soul after he’s lived through war in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan. It is the story of the same gender couple who has the courage and faith to come to church, not sure if they will find judgement and hate or acceptance and love. It is the story of the youth who finds the courage to stand up to friends or enemies and say no to drugs or bullying. It is the story of the person who serves others by giving of themselves, by giving of their financial gifts, by giving of their hearts. It is the story of the person who bears the pain of sickness without becoming angry and bitter. The Holy Spirit is at work today in our hearts and in our minds and in our souls.

What do you hear the Spirit urging you to do today? We have been talking since Easter about the freedom that we have. We have freedom to do life differently today because of Easter, because of the Risen Christ. We have freedom today to not live as we always have lived. We have freedom to begin again. In our scripture today the disciples were together, waiting, watching, and not sure about what to do. And then it happens, wind, fire, noise, and then silence. No one came to take away their problems. The Holy Spirit came and created a new problem! The disciples can’t stay inside. They have to go outside and preach and teach and pray and care and love and witness.

People, men and women, young and old, all begin sharing about how God has been at work in their lives. They offered testimony of how God healed them and how God set them free. They helped one another see God’s activity in the world, and they gave each other the courage to join in that holy work. They put their faith into words as they shared about what they know about God, what they believe about God, and what they trust about God.

The world was still as it always had been, but people found the strength and courage and compassion and they realized that they had a story to tell. We have a story to tell today and with the Holy Spirit we can’t help but share it. One person reaching out to another and then another to listen, to tell, to share, to hold, to preach, to feed, to care, to love.

God is still at work. There was a woman at the church I served in England who had a polio as a child. She used crutches and braces every day of her life and now she was in her 70s. When we had communion she would hold on to the communion rail and lower herself down. I would try to serve her as she stood up, but she wanted to kneel. One Sunday we did a healing service and before I put the sign of the cross on her forehead I asked her what she wanted healing from and she said, for the world to be one. God is still at work.

The Holy Spirit rushes through us like a wind and it is through the Holy Spirit that we are alive. The Spirit gave us breath and it is through the Spirit that we make our unique impression in this world. It is through the Spirit that we have love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We are challenged to become even more than we could dream through the Spirit and the Spirit frees us to be all that God would have us be.

The Holy Spirit fills us up to feel and know God’s grace and mercy. The Holy Spirit fills us up to feel and know that following the risen Jesus makes a difference in our lives. The Holy Spirit fills us up to feel and know that God is calling us today to make a difference in this world. What do you hear the Spirit urging you to do today? God is still at work.

The disciples were together when they heard that whoosh and the holy windstorm began to blow all around them. And they began speaking in all of these different languages about God’s powerful deeds in their world. And all of these different people heard the noise and recognized their mother tongue and came to see what was happening. And they expected to find their own kind, people who looked like them. After all they were talking in their own language. But they didn’t recognize the speakers. And Peter told the people gathered that it was the Holy Spirit. It was in the middle of that chaos and testimony that the church was born. The Holy Spirit came into them with power and the disciples were able to put aside their fear of sharing about Jesus. The Church was born in courage, when people stood up and spoke. The church moved from silence to sharing the good news of Jesus the Christ. The good news is that no matter what the world tries to tell you life is stronger than death and hope is deeper than despair. God is still at work.

From that moment of Pentecost, to speak good news into the brokenness and tragedy of the world became the gift and responsibility of the Church, of us. It is our gift and responsibility to share how being a follower of Jesus changes our lives, how it affects us. It is our gift and responsibility to share why being a part of Christ’s body, the Church, matters. It is our gift and responsibility to share why being a part of Greenland Hills matters. We are called because of our baptism to work for justice, to be a voice for those whose voices are not heard, to advocate for those on the margins, to leverage whatever power we have to help create a more just, a more merciful, a more hope-filled world. On this day of Pentecost may we stand up and speak to breathe in God’s courage and to offer the good news into the brokenness and tragedy of our lives and of our world. We don’t know where the Spirit will move next, but we know she will. God is still at work! Thanks be to God, Amen.