

Good morning. Welcome to the Day of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost. Our exciting red day.

I'd like to start by thanking everyone for your concern, your good wishes, your offerings of flowers and cards, soup and cookies and other lovely things this past week. I'm grateful to The Rev Frank Huntress for filling in for me last Sunday on such short notice.

I felt, as you were worshipping here last Sunday morning, as though I had been hit by a truck. It was a potent strain of intestinal flu that hit me, though, not a truck. And the timing being what it was, I ended up going to the Salem ER for relief. It took a long time to get care but it was good, thorough care, and it resulted in my being admitted and spending 3 days in Salem Hospital. I am grateful to be able to say that it was nothing but flu and that I am about 90% restored. You may not even have known about all this, and if not, don't worry. It's over. Again, many thanks for your concern.

So, the Day of Pentecost. The grand entrance of the Holy Spirit. It's no wonder it took the early church a long time to develop a doctrine of the Holy Spirit. It was one thing to talk about Jesus after he was risen and ascended into heaven. He had at one time been flesh and blood. People had talked with him and touched him and received his blessing. But the Spirit was Jesus' promise of an advocate to come after him, a comforter to be with them always. Just not one they could see.

Wind described the Spirit, according to this exciting account of a day in Jerusalem when Jews who had returned to their spiritual home from exile in all the nations of the known world, who had been raised to speak a variety of languages, could all hear and understand the disciples' words about God's deeds of power. Wind. Powerful. Invisible. A sound like the rush of a violent wind blew through the house, filled the house where they were sitting.

Did you know the word for 'Spirit' is the same as the word for 'wind' and the word for 'breath,' in all three of the languages of the Bible – in Hebrew, Greek and Latin.

It's "ruach" in Hebrew. It even sounds like wind—*ruach*. Spirit. Breath. In Greek it's *pneuma* as in pneumatic or pneumonia. It's about air, breath, wind, spirit. And in Latin – *spiritus*. "Inspire" is to breathe in the spirit. "Expire" is life and breath leaving the body.

Spirit equals breath and wind and life. Spirit is life itself. Without Spirit we have no life. And while we can't see the Spirit, we can certainly see the effect it has on ourselves and others.

Many of those present on that first Pentecost thought the disciples had been drinking. They heard them speaking by the leading of the Spirit, and it must have sounded strange.

Drunkenness seemed the only explanation for their bizarre, uncharacteristic behavior. But it was a different kind of inner warming that was going on, as Peter explained with that classic line, "it's only 9 o'clock in the morning!"

I'm reminded of a story about inner warming.

The beloved Mother Superior of a certain convent was dying.

The sisters were gathered around her bed, doing everything possible to make her comfortable. One nun brought her some warm milk, but she refused to drink it.

Taking the glass back to the kitchen, the nun suddenly had an idea.

She took from the cupboard a bottle of whiskey that had been a gift the previous Christmas, opened it, and poured a generous amount into the cup of milk.

Then she took it back to the Mother's bedroom and held the cup once more to the old woman's lips. The Mother Superior sipped a bit, then a bit more, then continued drinking until it was all gone.

Perceiving that she was coming to the end, one of the nuns asked her, "Mother, please give us some wisdom before you die."

Her eyes wide, the beloved Mother Superior raised herself up on her elbow, pointed out the window, and said, "Don't let that cow get away."

When we are truly warmed in a meaningful way we do not want to let go of whatever it was that made us feel that way. We want very much to keep the cow. The experience of the Holy Spirit is one that we seek again and again once we've known it.

So often an encounter with the Spirit comes when it's least expected and it comes into the midst of darkness. It worked that way with me.

I had begun thinking about going to seminary to become a priest in the late 1960s, when Jack and I were living in Montpelier, VT. A woman couldn't be ordained a priest yet but there was hope that it would happen before long and there were many women ordained as deacons, waiting for the action of General Convention.

My dreams of entering the ordination process in Vermont came to a stop when Jack and I moved to Ohio in 1974 to pursue a really fine job in his field. I hoped it would be short-term. But as it turned out, our Ohio years stretched to 34.

They were good years, but not what I had planned, and I put the idea of ordination way on the back burner while working at various jobs as our boys got older, ultimately in order to help put them through college.

Twenty-five years after my first thoughts of serving God in the Church I attended a party on the eve of the ordination of a very dear friend who had completed seminary training and would become a priest the next morning. My part in the liturgy was to read that beautiful passage from the 2nd chapter of Philippians, "at the name of Jesus every knee should bend."

There were other women there who had been ordained. It was now 1994 and being female was no longer an impediment. Sitting at dinner with these friends, celebrating Mary's achievement, I was suddenly overcome with emotion, grief at not having been able to reach this dream myself.

I did what women do in such situations, I grabbed my purse and I rushed off to the ladies' room. I tried to do it unobtrusively but my sisters were all tuned in and 5 or 6 of them tumbled into the rest room right after me.

There were tears and hugs and words of encouragement. I remember there was a waitress in there washing her hands who had no idea what was happening. But the question came from one of my friends – “Why not?” And I realized there was no longer anything holding me back.

I felt the power of the Holy Spirit in that moment and the course of my life changed. I left that gathering and went home and called up my rector and started the process for ordination in Ohio and never looked back. From that evening on I felt the supporting power of the Holy Spirit with me.

There's real power in feeling the Spirit's presence, but the true test is how we are changed, how the Spirit takes our lives and makes something happen.

Every time we say, as we do in the creeds, and will shortly, “I believe in the Holy Spirit,” we are saying that we trust that God is alive now and is able to enter into each of us and into this parish community and transform us, change our lives for good.

The Church is nothing without this power. Hear these sage words from a leader of the World Council of Churches:

“Without the Holy Spirit, God is far away, Christ stays in the past, the Gospel is a dead letter, the Church is simply an organization, authority is a matter of domination, mission a matter of propaganda, liturgy is no more than evocation, and Christian living is a slave-like morality. But in the Holy Spirit: the cosmos is resurrected and groans with the birth pangs of the Kingdom, the risen Christ is here, the Gospel is the power of life, the Church shows forth the life of the Trinity, authority is a liberating service, mission is Pentecost, liturgy is both memorial and anticipation, and human action is deified.”

Wow. It's a lot. The power of the Holy Spirit is earth-shaking and it is with us. And how does it change us?

I think it changes us a lot and often. I am so proud of our youth for what I heard was an informative and lively evening last Sunday as they presented the Hunger Banquet to benefit Oxfam International's battle against world hunger. I hear that a good crowd attended and that our young people hosted the event with grace and elevated the awareness of everyone present concerning the issue of world hunger. I'm grateful to Audrey Gutfreund, our youth leader, for her leadership among them. This is the kind of difference-making activity that can give our youth a chance to hear and feel the wind of the Holy Spirit and to spread it to others.

How does the spirit change us?

We will only know if we listen for the leading of the Spirit and trust in Jesus' promise that the Spirit of truth will be with us and is with us, and in us.
Thanks be to God.

Soli Deo Gloria