

Karen Hollis May 31, 2020 Acts 2:1-21

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us today, in Jesus' name we pray. Amen

I went out one morning a few weeks ago and realized that it wasn't early spring anymore. There was a warmth to the air, still with the freshness we expect from this season. It's the time where we start regularly opening windows to let that fresh air and breeze move through our homes after being shut tight for the winter. It's kind of an invitation to let go and allow in some new energy and with it, new life. I think there is an unspoken understanding with the breeze, though, that it will remain gentle, but we've all had the experience of the rush of a great wind through the window that knocks things over and sending papers flying. It can be quite dramatic, sometimes funny and potentially upsetting.

But the wind that describes the Spirit coming on Pentecost is another kind of wind entirely . . . we have that kind of wind here too . . . it's the kind that cuts out the power for a week. It's the sound of a violent wind. The word violent jumped off the page at me when I read the text this week. It's an interesting word, usually associated with physical harm to another or setting buildings on fire, as we've been seeing on the news. The Haven defines violence as crossing another person's boundary – it's a really different way of thinking about it. Boundaries are interesting too – it took me nearly 20 years of Haven programs to learn what a boundary is. A boundary is self-defining; a boundary says this is who I am or what I need in this situation. So the Holy Spirit comes in a way that challenges their understanding of themselves, how they define themselves to the world. They have been focusing on following Jesus and processing his death and resurrection. It is now time for something pretty different . . . sharing his gospel with the world around them . . . it's a different calling . . . related but different. So, the Holy Spirit comes in this particular moment, blowing in the windows of their selves, cleaning out what has become stale, moving the energy, knocking some things over and reorganizing others, shifting them for the ministry ahead. They are open, they've been waiting, they have been praying 'come Holy Spirit.' And because boundaries are flexible, they can redefine their understanding of themselves and communicate it to the world.

The first thing the Spirit does then is to help the disciples connect with the people around them. The sound of the spirit has caught the crowd's attention and the Spirit gifts the disciples with the ability to speak in the languages of the people gathered . . . the spirit doesn't change the ears of the people hearing, the spirit changes the tongues of the disciples as they speak. The people say, wow – what is going on here? They are speaking my language; I really love what they're saying; they really get me, they get me so much, I'm thinking this is pretty weird . . . are they ok?

Here at Christ Church, we have been naming a shift in our life together, from a group of people forming Christian community out of 2 primary denominational contexts, to an established community of faith seeking to be of service to the community and world around us. As I was planning which hymns to record, I read this morning's opening hymn for Pentecost and thought, well this is our visioning prayer! The first verse says: (put up slide)

Come, O Spirit, dwell among us,

come with pentecostal power;
give the church a stronger vision,
help us face each crucial hour.
Built upon a firm foundation,
Jesus Christ, the cornerstone,
still, the church is called to mission
that God's love shall be made known.

It's timely and bold. For months we've been praying for God to speak to us, to open our ears, to speak to us in ways we can hear and continue speaking until we understand. This hymn offers a different prayer. To pray for the Spirit to come in the way of Pentecost is to invite the One who on occasion challenges boundaries, who causes us to step outside our comfort zones to do things like letting go of old priorities and speaking in new ways. With this disrupting encounter with the Holy Spirit also comes a clear sense of self, a strong vision to guide us into an unwritten future, and the ability to effectively connect with those around us. This last piece has been on our hearts for a long time. We and those who came before us on Gabriola have been racking our brains for years about how to serve with the community, bringing some success and some frustration. Perhaps the Spirit will show up and take us where we didn't know we could go.

This kind of bold prayer may be just what we need to complete this visioning process. We've come this far with God's help . . . we've become a community with a strong sense of unity and commitment to each other. Come Holy Spirit, help us build on the foundation we created with your guidance and Christ the cornerstone. Help us to take the next step for our community of faith. Amen.