May 27, 2007 (Pentecost)
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Acts 2:1-21 Psalm 104:25-35 Romans 8:14-17 John 14:8-17

For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption.
(Romans 8:14-15 NRSV)

What on earth was going on that first day of Pentecost?!! (It was, after all, an earthly event and not some private ecstatic vision!)

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles tantalizes us with its skimpy story, and we are left wondering about many things.

Just who was gathered in one place that morning, and how many were there? Was the sudden sound like the sound I remember from childhood of an oncoming mid-western storm with all its ominous portent, or something else? How can we interpret within our own understanding the 'tongues' that rested upon them and the report that they spoke (or at least were heard) in languages other than their own? Those passing by, drawn perhaps by the sound, were befuddled also – not altogether unlike ourselves. Some cynically thought that cocktail hour had begun much too early and that they overheard a bunch of crazy drunks!

Parts of it must just be left to question – a deeply holy puzzle but a pivot for everything that was to follow – even to this very day, to this very moment.

Pentecost claims our attention, not just as a strange and quirky historical memory about the so called 'birthday' of the Church. Pentecost is not simply the past; Pentecost is right now; it is this very hour here in this room, and not just here but in all the spaces and places and times of our lives – it is every precious moment of the Spirit's presence and expression – creating, renewing, enlivening, transforming – gifts of Holy Spirit to our spirits again and again and again.

Fifty days had passed since a little band of courageous and faithful women walked together in the dim light of early dawn to anoint the body of Jesus. There they found an empty tomb. There all despair and doubt was left behind. There, in the presence of the Risen Christ, their future (and ours!) was transformed – redirected – given new birth for the creative and redeeming purposes of God.

After that he appeared – to them and to others – talking, eating, showing the evidence of his wounds, and even allowing himself to be touched.

Then he ceased to appear among them in those same ways; his followers and friends were a people in waiting for what was to come.

The 'gift of the Spirit': the language and imagery of scripture and our spiritual tradition surges and leaps trying to express what it means.

Centuries earlier the psalmist sang out the words we heard chanted today: *'When you send forth your spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the ground.'*

And Peter addressing the onlookers, presumably that first Pentecost morning, quotes words from Joel's prophesy: *'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 . . . .'*

Good news! – mothers, sisters, daughters! The prophet wisely knew early on that you are in on the center of action, not the periphery!

The writer of John's Gospel recalls a promise Jesus made to his friends: *'. . . I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you for ever.'*

'Spirit' is called God's breath – a breath touching and enlivening God's beloved creation.

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'Spirit' is called Advocate, Counselor, Companion – all terms of intimate and abiding holy presence that is unswerving, persistent – a presence that will never ever abandon us.

I love the words of a Gospel hymn: '..I can't believe he's brought me this far to leave me.' (What a wonderful and emotionally honest faith expression!)

'Spirit' is called Wisdom, and the voice of scripture has it that the Spirit of Wisdom is 'she' – let all take note that 'she' has not brought us this far to leave us either!

For me though, Paul's words to the church in Rome touch the very core. We've heard them before, but we need to listen now as though for the very first time – with all the sharp directness of his affirmation.

'For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God', he says. What a statement! It doesn't get more intimate than that. God's 'creation' is one thing; God's 'children' – that is something much more! Think about it. You and I are nothing less than God's children. What does that say about who we are and what we are to do?

'For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption….(W)e are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ…'

Do you hear it? Can you let yourself feel the richness of that kinship and promise?

My daughter, Sarah, is an adopted child; with her and because of her I have experienced the reality that 'adoption' is a truly precious and transformative experience.

Paul writes that all of us <u>are</u> God's adopted children, heirs with Christ, in the benefit and the work of everything God is still doing to bring to life what God intends for God's creation.

You and I are God's chosen children. We have <u>not</u> been brought this far to be left alone. This day, every day, all of God's time, is that kind of Pentecost for us.

There are many rich signposts of what that may mean. Here are a couple.

A highly diverse and global group of Anglican women recently met, and, knowing the strains and threats now voiced in our communion, they declared that whatever happens they intend to keep working together and indeed expanding in commitment to the shared mission of the Church . .

Some younger adults are responding in newer, fresher ways to religious communities that focus primarily on spiritual life and discernment, prayer and community support, rather than gimmicks and the strident claims of false certainties.

Christians who deeply value the revelation and the integrity of their own tradition are entering into new, respectful and searching listening and dialogue with other great faith traditions, and want no traffic with the dark evil of interfaith warfare and hatred.

Voices of wisdom and insight urge us to recognize that what we do with our daily lives – our vocations, our tasks, our commitments, our gifts and our creativity – are the absolute heartland of what ministry is all about. It is a ministry that belongs to each of us, not just those in orders.

Here within our parish there is incredible richness and value and diversity of that kind of ministry. We are healers, teachers, artists, business folk, guides and helpers for children, managers, researchers and more, much more. We are just what God needs to do what God is still doing to transform the world. That is the holy, holy truth.

So, my fellow children of God, the Spirit claims us. We matter very much! Pentecost is now and Pentecost is still unfolding!

One of today's hymns is the heartfelt prayer of a Pentecost people. Let it be ours!

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Come down, O Love Divine,
seek thou this soul of mine,
and visit it with thine own ardor glowing;
O Comforter draw near, within my heart appear,
and kindle it, thy holy flame bestowing. . . .

And so the yearning strong,
with which the soul will long,
shall far outpass the power of human telling;
For none can guess its grace,
till Love create a place
wherein the Holy Spirit makes a dwelling.

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