***The Spirit That Moves* Acts 2:1-21, John 7: 37-39 May 31, 2020**

Some time ago now, I became aware of the smoke rising from the candles lit at the beginning of worship and extinguished at the end of worship. Part of that is the symbolic bringing in of the light and then taking the light out as we leave. The light comes in and the light goes out with the people. The smoke rising when the candles were extinguished became for me the prayers of the people. And that has been with me ever since, seeing the smoke rising the smoke as a symbol for the prayers on their way and the light bringing the prayers in some way. Candles lit and extinguished are symbols in our worship… something we miss now just like the bright red paraments. But the people are the ones who worship. The symbols are helpful, but worship needs people, what they each bring in gifts, openness, words and caring. All these things are attitudes of worship that make us vulnerable before God and one another.

Pentecost is filled with celebration and color and symbolism. It is the Spirit who creates the Church. The whole place those early believers met was filled with what came from heaven. It was a sound like a violent wind, and then something like flames of fire appeared among them and rested on each. Filled with the Holy Spirit they could speak in differing languages. And soon others heard and gathered and were amazed. And yes, some made fun of and belittled those who could do what could not be explained or understood: mystery and of the Holy.

Peter is the spokesman and sees what is happening as fulfilling the prophet’s words… words of God spoken through the prophet Joel. Pentecost in Greek means *fiftieth.* It is the Jewish Festival of Weeks, which began when the first fruits of the harvest were presented to God fifty days after Passover. And on this day Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection of Christ, the Holy Spirit came to the church. Things are so connected, always something coming out of history or tradition or the Word, but always new. It is of the Creator, of the Word and of all that is One. Different languages all being understood is about unity out of diversity.

Jesus words echo the movement of the Spirit which comes and goes but enlarges and empowers words and ways and faith. Those who believe shall have in their hearts what flows and gives vitality and meaning to life in need of love for self and all others. The movement of the Spirit promised and given is a movement in love. And that movement is reflected in the words wind and breath and spirit, which in both the Hebrew and the Greek are all one word. Wind moves over the land and the water, breath moves us and is life, spirit stirs and moves within.

We do not have to understand the Holy Spirit, but we do need it just as we need the wind and breath and the power of the work of the Spirit in what we do and say and be, as those who follow the very way of Jesus.

Parker Palmer has said that our own healing comes in building communities of concern, which we as a community of faith should be. Because in such communities we identify our pain with the pain of others as we are open to the experience of others.

That means we are vulnerable, and it means we go beyond the head to the heart and that what comes in our belief flows to another in their belief and in their need to which we are open.

And that movement of the Spirit given to a community of faith will not be kept in a room, a house, a building, It moves in and out with the people. And we can never really explain it, only know it points ever to God and not to us.

There was a fragile man I visited in a nursing facility. He could not speak. When I told him who I was and why I was visiting him, he pointed to a bright red cross symbol on his Stryker bed frame, then he pointed to me, nodded, then folded his arms, closed his eyes, and waited for a prayer. Over and over we did that through the time and the visits I was with him. I have always believed that he brought the Spirit and I brought the words and it was knit together in the Spirit of Truth. I heard what he wanted, and he heard my words. There was a flow and it was beautiful. The first time I visited him was the first time in that facility and when I left, I went out the wrong door and set off an alarm. That part I thought I did all by myself. But I have come to wonder if maybe I had a little help with that so that there was some bells and whistles for the wonder of what went on there in prayer.

In one church where we met in the winter in the annex near a window rather than heat the sanctuary. As we began worship a red cardinal was at the annex window and paused like it was looking in. I heard a deep pause, almost like everyone held their breath just watching. It was being touched by God’s coming in that beauty of Spirit in the beauty of nature, a moment of color moving, blessing the breath, of worship.

Someone said to me this week that this pandemic time is like we are in exile. In the prophet Jeremiah’s words, “I will bring you back to this place. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you and will bring you back.” It seems like things do come full circle. We are brought back around to newness and movement.

Our worship service looks like it is linear, a beginning and an end. But I believe it is circular. We come to God, we ask God’s help, forgiveness and mercy, we praise in prayer and song, we listen to God’s word and we offer something of our gifts and ourselves, we share in communion and in God’s love through Christ and through it all we are knit together by the movement of the Holy Spirit, nourished, renewed, given something to take us back out to wherever we are in the world to be disciples.

I also see interim time as circular time in the life history of the church. It is a time set aside to move through specific tasks and take time to be knit anew in the Holy Spirit’s comfort and guidance that this church may then go on in a new and renewed way. It is coming full circle into wholeness and newness and that is creative spiritual work by the grace of God.

The way of Jesus, the way of newness following Jesus into the world, has to be lived out in the fruit of the Spirit as Paul tells us in Galatians (5:22-23). Those ways we work at are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. In our interim times and process we stay centered in God as God relieves fear, renews energy, and heals, moving us ever into wholeness. Amen.