

Sermon – May 31, 2020
“Clothed in the Holy Spirit”
The Rev. John C. Wright

Text: Acts 2:1-21

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Visit, fill, and enter the sharing of these Words. Make them to be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Amen

Good morning everyone and welcome to the Northumberland Charge live stream worship. I want to welcome everyone and thank you for joining us as we seek to worship in new ways during our journey together through the COVID-19 pandemic. I want to thank everyone who has worked to make this morning possible, for the volunteers who are helping and for the wonderful musicians who have joined us today. Please take a moment and type a word of greeting into the comment line to let us know that you have joined us live or later on a replay of the live stream.

One of the aspects of this morning's scripture that stands out for me as I read this account of the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is the sound of the violent wind. This week as I have prepared to preach about the coming of the Holy Spirit, I was reminded of my own encounter with the sound of a violent wind. For those of you who don't know, I love to sail. I find great joy working with the wind to move a boat across the water and working with the elements of nature to go before or into the wind, hopefully to where I want to go. I learned to sail in a reservoir in West Virginia, which is a very unlikely place to learn to sail as it presents many interesting challenges since the wind is not very directional but tends to move in turbulent swirls. Early in our marriage after moving to King George, Virginia, I convinced Kay that it would be a lot of fun to buy a sailboat, and we bought a used Hobie Cat from a couple in DC who were really excited to sell us their boat. It is on that boat that my memories of a violent wind were born. We were out racing our boat on the Potomac River on a hot hazy summer afternoon when we encountered an embedded thunderstorm. First, the little bit of wind that we were enjoying stopped, and we were becalmed. Then, we began to hear thunder moving towards us while we were stranded out on the water. A Hobie Cat is built for only one thing, to go fast

before the wind, and consequently there is no place for a motor. As the storm drew closer, we reefed the main and then waited. The winds picked up as the thunder cell came over us, and I thought we might be able to make it to the dock, about a half mile away, before it got bad as the winds were picking up quickly. The wind got what I thought was pretty strong, but we were okay and making rapid progress to the dock. Then, I heard the sound of a violent wind. It was not a sound I had heard before. The wind I had been struggling to sail into was in reality a “gentle breeze” by comparison to what came across the water that afternoon as the storm fully arrived. There are no trees out on the water for the wind to scream through, but you could hear the sound of the wind coming across the water, and then we were in the midst of a violent wind and it was powerful. Now, obviously, we survived our experience with that violent wind and went on to sail other days. But when I read in Acts about the sound of a violent wind, it is the sound of the wind coming over the water that day that comes to my mind. For the disciples in the house, they only experience the sound of a mighty wind, and the sound alerts them to the coming of power from on high, a power sent from heaven.

On the day of Pentecost, the disciples experience something that we really have no words to describe. This is not a phenomenon of nature that we can describe with words from our current scientific knowledge. The coming of the Holy Spirit is a meeting of the spiritual and physical in order to provide a new gift for the church. This is an event that is outside of our ability to categorize with science. If we try, we will only end with failure and frustration. The coming of the Holy Spirit is an event that we can only experience and witness the impact of the Holy Spirit in our life and the lives of those who are open to receive such an outpouring. We can experience and witness the effects of the spiritual in the actions of those who receive such power.

In Luke’s account of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, we find three attributes of nature used as descriptors, wind, fire, and speech. A sound described as a violent wind is heard. Something visible, described as fire, comes among and on the disciples and is seen as a visible aspect of the Spirit, and speech is heard in a unique, universal manner coming forth from those who receive the Holy Spirit. It is noteworthy that the sound of the wind is heard but there are none of the physical effects of a violent wind like those I experienced out on the water that day. There is the physical sight of something Luke describes as a tongue of fire, but there is no indication of the heat and burning that accompanies a physical fire, at least not external burning. And finally, there is the sound of speech, but the words are not a language those speaking know,

and their words are heard and understood by those who speak other languages. These plain spoken, working class Galileans are speaking the languages from countries they have never visited. These are the marks of the coming of the gift of the Holy Spirit. Luke does a great job describing the supernatural in the terms of the natural. What we need to grasp is that with the coming of the Holy Spirit the believers present are now clothed with the promised power from heaven. Luke will spend the rest of the Book of Acts trying to help us understand what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. He will do this by sharing with us the experiences of the disciples living as those filled with the Holy Spirit. The gift Jesus promised, the gift of Power from on high, has arrived. What that means for these disciples and for us today is a challenge to comprehend.

There are implications for the arrival and pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost for the church universal. First, the arrival of the Holy Spirit confirms that Jesus has ascended into heaven. We hear this in the words of scripture “and suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind.” Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit, power from on high to clothe the believers with, and now he does. The power from on high has arrived. This moment confirms for us that Jesus is now seated at the right hand of God. There, Jesus has access to the power of a Holy God. Jesus is now in heaven to intercede on our behalf. The arrival of the Holy Spirit at the first Pentecost confirms and assures us as believers that Jesus is alive in heaven and will come again as he told the disciples. Until that second coming, we live in the age of the Holy Spirit. This is the final act of the salvation of Jesus. Jesus was born fully human and walked the same earth that we walk, lived life as we live, died for our sins, was resurrected from the dead, and ascended into heaven. Now Jesus has sent his Spirit to his people, the believers across all time, a Spirit that will abide until he comes again. We now live in the age of the Holy Spirit until Jesus returns. The Holy Spirit forms believers into Jesus’ body on earth. Believers are now the church clothed with Power from above and enabled in that power to be about Jesus’ mission to all people. Jesus’ ministry does not end with his ascension. This is his Spirit to enable us to continue his mission.

Another key point in the arrival of the Holy Spirit is the speaking in tongues. Notice the list of countries Luke includes when he identifies the devout Jews from other countries who are now living in Jerusalem and are drawn to the sound of these Spirit-filled disciples speaking about the deeds of God. These devout Jews are drawn to this sound, the words describing God’s deeds

heard in all of the languages of the world where the Jews were currently living. This universal sharing of God's deeds in all languages points to a mission to all people of the world. This is not a mission to teach people who want to follow Jesus the words of God in Greek or Hebrew, but a mission to unify the people of the world through the Good News of Jesus Christ shared with them in their heart language. This gift of tongues points to a mission to all people. The Bible is translated into the languages of the people who it is taken to. This mission goes on today as the Bible continues to be carried to new people groups and translated into their heart languages, so that they also may hear the Good News, the deeds of God. This is a reversal of the confusing of language God brought about at Babel when the peoples of the world were separated from each other by God, confusing their unified language with many languages and ending their selfish attempt to put themselves into God's place.

Let me recap what Pentecost means to us today. First, it is Jesus' final act of his salvation ministry. Second, it is the equipping of Christ's followers to be in his mission. Third, it is the beginning of the new era of the Holy Spirit, an era that will continue until Jesus returns. And finally, it is the first revival or awakening of people. Peter will stand up and address the crowd that has gathered at the sound of the proclamation of the mighty deeds of God in their native languages. Some of those present will be drawn to Peter's message and will accept Christ and become believers. Others will reject the disciples' message and mock them as drunkards. Yet some 3000 become believers this day, and daily more are added to the ranks of believers. What starts at Pentecost continues today. The fire of the Holy Spirit may seem dim to us here in this place at this moment, but in other places across the world it burns brighter than ever and, in many places, even today, in the midst of a pandemic, more will be added to their number. Here is a place for prayer. Pray that in our lives together as believers, the Holy Spirit will be poured out and the flames of true revival will be reignited right here right now.

Let me make a few comments about the Holy Spirit this morning with a promise to share more details in future sermons. Christians in general do not know a great deal about the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit never points to himself; he always points believers to God and Jesus. This morning I don't want to leave you wondering who the Holy Spirit is and what an encounter with the Holy Spirit brings in our lives. There are four aspects of the touch of the Holy Spirit that I would like to share this morning. First, when the Spirit touches us, he always leaves us hungry for Jesus. Whatever manifestation the outpouring of the Holy Spirit may bring

to a person initially, this aspect of the Spirit's touch is always present, a greater hunger to know more about Jesus Christ, a growing desire to be more like Jesus, a desire to grow closer to the Lord. This is the sure sign that one has been touched by the Holy Spirit. Very often this hunger is seen in the life of a believer as a new desire to be in the scriptures and seeking through them to know the Word of God seen in the life of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh. If you have a desire to learn about Jesus, then you have been in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Second, a touch of the Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin. The Great Awakening that occurred in Virginia around the time of the Revolutionary War was characterized by an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and many of the people who received the Holy Spirit became so convicted of their sin and need for a Savior that they would be found crying out to God for help. They would be drawn into a church service desperate for a Savior. A touch of the Spirit will make us aware of the sin that remains in our lives. But with conviction comes the power of the refiner's fire to cleanse us of our sin and to change us to be more like Jesus. This is the tongue of fire, the refiner's fire, the power to change us, to bring us into holiness. If you find a new awareness of sin in your life and a desire to be free of your sin, you are encountering the Holy Spirit.

Third, a touch of the Holy Spirit awakens the desire in our heart to share the Good News with others. This aspect of the touch of the Holy Spirit also empowers us to boldly proclaim the Good News. This is the power that allows a fisherman to stand up in a crowd of thousands and share the Good News of Jesus Christ with the crowd drawn by the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the place the believers were gathered. A touch of the Holy Spirit brings this same desire and power to all. The steadfast love of God they experience awakens a new desire to share the love of Jesus Christ with those in our lives. If you find a desire to share Jesus with those in your life with whom you have relationships, you have experienced the touch of the Holy Spirit.

Fourth and finally, a touch of the Holy Spirit brings change. This is the power to change our hard heart to a heart God can use to share His love with other believers and all people. This is the gift of tongues seen on the first Pentecost that bewildered the crowd and changed the disciples from scared witnesses sitting in hiding to those standing and boldly proclaiming the Good News to all people, even to people who reject their message. The touch of the Holy Spirit changes our desires from self-love to love of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit's touch changes our desire for self-love to a new desire to love God and love our neighbors. The Holy Spirit's touch

enables us to overcome sin in our lives and to be changed into a child of God. As John Wesley put it, the touch of the Holy Spirit changes us so that “sin no longer reigns in our lives.” If you find new strength to walk in the way of God, you have experienced the touch of the Holy Spirit.

We are not gathered together or even dispersed across many places in our homes this morning, to celebrate an event that happened 1,982 years ago. We are gathered because we are believers in Christ, and we also may receive this gift, a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As we close, let me pray that all who hear my words this morning will receive the Holy Spirit and that you will continue to joyfully pray for an out pouring of the Holy Spirit into your life and the lives of those around us. Ask Jesus to send Power from on High into your heart and wait in prayer for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Let me close with the words from a hymn about the coming of the Holy Spirit written by Charles Wesley. These words are from his hymn, “O Thou who camest from above,” and I think they are an excellent summary about the coming of the Holy Spirit.

O Thou who camest from above, the pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love upon the mean altar of my heart.
There let it for thy glory burn with inextinguishable blaze,
And trembling to its source return, in humble prayer and fervent praise.
Jesus, confirm my heart's desire to work and speak and think for thee;
Still let me guard the holy fire, and still stir up thy gift in me.
Ready for all thy perfect will, my acts of faith and love repeat,
Till death thy endless mercies seal, and make my sacrifice complete.

Pray with me: Jesus, send the power from above to clothe us. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Refine us with wind and fire that we might be a people unified in the steadfast love of God through our Savior Jesus Christ. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Amen.