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WINDS OF PENTECOST

by Pastor Clarissa Martinelli

“Who has seen the wind? /Neither I nor you: /But when the leaves hang trembling, /The wind is passing through.

Who has seen the wind? /Neither you nor I: /But when the leaves bow down their heads, /The Wind is passing by.” - Christina Rossetti

As you have observed since you walked in the sanctuary this morning, today is Pentecost. Pentecost is one of the great festivals of the church year. Pentecost is indeed one of the happy days, one of the festival days, and the mood is that of a party.

Today, to help us in our festive mood, we have four contemporary symbols that remind us of Pentecost: balloons, birthday cakes, birthday candles, and speaking in different languages.

Brightly colored red balloons are rising from the pews. During the worship, you will see the wind, in this case air conditioning, move the balloons and the mobiles. These balloons are to remind us that God is like the wind: invisible, moving, mysterious, blowing across the universe.

God breathed into Adam and gave him life. God is breath. God is life. God breathed into you and me and gave us life. Pentecost reminds us that God is the invisible life force within the universe. Without breath, there would be no life at all.

A person cannot see the wind but only the effects of the wind. Likewise with us; we cannot see God but only the effects of God. We see God’s footprints but not God’s feet. We see God’s handprints but not God’s hands. We can see God’s footprints in the lakes and see God’s handiwork with the mountains, but we cannot see God face to face. A basic tenet of the Christian faith is that God is invisible and powerful like the wind. The balloons remind us of God’s invisibility.

Pentecost is also the day that reminds us of the birthday of the church.

And a birthday cake would not be complete without candles. The dancing flames of our birthday candles remind us of those tongues of fire on that first Pentecost

morning. What does fire represent? Fire is energy; fire is power; fire is passion. Fire is energy for Jesus Christ, and on Pentecost, there was a new quality of fire and energy for Jesus Christ. Fire is another symbol on our festive Pentecost morning.

Our final contemporary symbol of Pentecost is the various languages. What fun! On the first day of Pentecost 2000 years ago, there were many different languages spoken.

[Read Acts 1:8 simultaneously.]

⁸But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Acts 1:8

When everyone read this Scripture simultaneously, it sounds like babbling. The purpose was to clearly demonstrate that the message of Jesus Christ is for all nations and languages. The message of Jesus Christ is to go into the entire world, into all the languages of the world, into all the nationalities in the world. We are missionary people. We are a Pentecostal people.

And so on this Pentecost morning and all the past Pentecost mornings in years past, we bring out our contemporary symbols to remind us of the birthday party of the church: balloons and cakes and candles and languages. We clearly know what Pentecost is all about.

On that first Pentecost morning the disciples and other believers were gathered in an upper room in Jerusalem. The disciples had been told to wait and pray for the Holy Spirit, for the powerful presence of God to come upon them. So the disciples waited and prayed, waited and prayed. They sensed the presence of God blowing among them. Suddenly, there were like tongues of fire on each of them. There was a new energy and a new power within them. Suddenly, they began to speak in a multiplicity of different languages. It was clear: Christians were not to remain in Jerusalem but go into the entire world, proclaiming the goodness about Jesus Christ in the various mother tongues of the nations.

On that first Pentecost morning, there was a new sense of mission. These men and women sensed a new purpose, a new goal, and a new destiny. Their destiny was to go into the entire world and proclaim the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Their purpose was absolutely clear to them: to boldly proclaim the name of Jesus Christ. They didn't have to ask what their mission was.

There was also a new power within. There was a new energy and urgency to carry out their mission. There was energy inside of them to accomplish their goals. These people had new courage to face persecutions. They had new boldness so as to be more outspoken for their faith. They had a new powerful passion within to stand before family, friends, neighbors, and fellow workers and boldly tell the good news of Jesus Christ and his impact on their daily lives. There was plenty of power.

There was also a new sense of community. These first Christians took their possessions and sold their material goods to help those in need. They loved each other so much they sold their possessions in order to help each other. Yes, there was a new sense of loving within this community: sharing problems, sharing each other's tragedies, sharing resources. They experienced community love and sharing of resources like they had never experienced it before.

That is what happened early one morning in Jerusalem in the year 30 AD, fifty days after the Jewish Passover.

The primary mission of the Pentecostal Christians was to go out into the world, teaching, baptizing and making disciples of all people. But 2000 years later, 21st Century Christians feel uneasy about carrying out this primary mission, and so we subtly change the mission of the church to teaching our Christian heritage and values and beliefs to our family and children. Our primary Christian purpose then becomes bringing our children to Sunday School and worship so that hopefully, they will become little Christians with likeminded values and belief systems. The purpose of the church becomes: transmit our heritage, liturgy, worship patterns, values and beliefs to the next generation in our family. Methodism does not primarily reach out beyond its walls; but teaches the faith, safely in its walls.

So what is the purpose of today's sermon and today's Pentecost? The same as 2000 years ago. We pray that a miracle will occur and that God will create Pentecostal Christians who are on fire for Jesus Christ, who have energy to do God's work in the world, who speak boldly and openly about Christ and his power in our own lives.

How does God create Pentecostal Christians today? That is the big question. How does God create Pentecostal Christians out of mainline Christians, so that we are more bold and courageous in speaking about our faith in Christ? A Pentecostal Christian is not somebody who prayerfully speaks in tongues but speaks openly and effectively and boldly about Jesus Christ.

It is quite simple: God gives us both the courage and the words to be Pentecostal Christians. It does take courage to speak with one's neighbors and friends and family about Jesus Christ and his impact on our lives. It takes a lot of courage. The purpose of the Holy Spirit 2000 years ago and today is the same: to give Christian's backbone, stamina, moxy, boldness, to give us the wisdom to handle tension and rejection. Christians have always had to learn courage for the issue facing them. Christians have had to learn courage during racial issues. Christians had to learn how to stand up and stand out for injustice and face the consequences. If you are young and everybody around you, so it seems, is using drugs or booze, having sex, you need to learn courage to handle the pressure. Similarly, it takes courage to finally talk to someone about Jesus Christ. Just plain courage. God has always given the courage necessary for us to handle each and every situation. God does not fail in his promises to give us strength and courage. That's just the way it is.

God not only gives us courage, God also gives us the words, the actual words to speak to a neighbor or friend. Throughout the centuries and throughout every culture, God has always provided the right words for us to speak in a given situation.

The purpose of Pentecost? One word: Spirit. In Hebrew, it is the word, "ruach." In Greek, it is the word, "pneumatous." In English, it is the word "wind" which can be also translated "spirit" or "breath." But it was on this day, in the Book of Acts, that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Followers of Christ who were gathered in an Upper Room in Jerusalem. It was on this day that the Church was born in a Blaze of Glory.

The purpose of the Holy Spirit is to make the church alive. The Spirit of God gets into church. The Spirit of God blows us off the front porch, blows us out of our pews, blows us out of our institutions and safe communities and into the world.

The meteorologist from years ago said that "wind is air on the move." When the air is heated up, it becomes wind. That is what the church is. We are on the move. The church is air on the move. Moving out of our pews. Moving out of our church buildings. Moving out of the safety of our friendships in church. Moving out into the world around us. Moving into our schools, neighborhoods, places of work. We are air on the move.

Why is the Holy Spirit here in this room today, filling this sanctuary? Why are the winds of God blowing around your life, filling you and making you strong? Is it to

make you *feel* good? Yes. ... Is it to heal your wounds when you are hurt? ... Yes. Is it to give you comfort when a loved one dies? Yes. ... Is it to give your life meaning when your life has totally fallen apart? Yes. ... Is it to forgive you when your life is lived in a way contrary to the will of God? Yes. ... But more than all that, the Spirit of Jesus Christ that surrounds you, is in you and around you, is given to you that you may have power. The Spirit is given to you so that you would have power to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ to all peoples.

For in Pentecost, the Church was given the power, the power that is greater than tornadoes, the power of the ruach, the power to proclaim with authority the message of Jesus Christ. YOU ... not the person next to you, YOU have been given that power, for YOU are a Spirit-filled person, and so am I.

It is to create Pentecostal Spirit-filled Christians, people like you and me.

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