

Pastor Roy's Sermon from June 8, 2014

The Day of Pentecost is a celebration! God is acting today. In the Hebrew Bible and for Jews today, Pentecost is the festival of first fruits—50 days after Passover. The barley harvest was on in Palestine. The festival of first fruits is a reminder that God is acting in creation to provide a harvest, to sustain the people of God. In fact, creation is filled with God acting. Therefore the people would set up tents and stay outside. This is probably because their land was not always in their backyard, and if you have piles of barley sitting out in a field somewhere, you might want to be out there making sure nobody takes it away until you can properly store it. So even after many people were not farmers, they had a ritual of living in tents for the time of this festival.

The Psalm we just read reminds us that creation is the first place we truly learn about God. God sends forth the Spirit and all living things are created. God feeds the creatures. The face of the earth is renewed. These truths bring pure joy to the psalmist who is not asking for God's blessing or proclaiming the superiority of humanity or one tribe over another, but the simple offering of a joyful response to God's creation. This is the spirit of Pentecost.

The New Testament focus of Pentecost is on the harvest of humanity. The renewal of humanity. The foundation is God's work in all of creation. The Spirit gives life to every living thing, but the focus is on humanity. The Spirit is poured out with Good News for all of humanity. —Good News that God's love and mercy extends to all. The Spirit calls us in Pentecost to work for justice, for kindness, for decent jobs and opportunity, and provision of basic needs.

As we trust and share, the Spirit flows in us and through us with joy and life. But if we fear and cling desperately to the gifts of the Spirit, they cease to flow. Joy and gladness are replaced with boredom and fear and the need for more. Greed takes root. Paranoia brings despair. It's not that the Spirit takes revenge or punishes by withholding, this flow of giving and sharing is simply the way things are. When we share, we find abundance; when we cling to what we don't even have, we lose.

As water and nutrients flow from roots, to trunk, to leaves where they meet the sun--so that energy can be stored in sugars and wood. . .so does the Spirit fill us. As the deer eats grass and bark and her body is nourished, so the Spirit flows within and to those who have learned the secret of grace and peace.

Sometimes, we might find ourselves hoping and praying that God will remove our suffering, take away our struggles, give us courage and the good life. Surely God will come and take care of all my problems and all of our problems as congregation and parish community. We might even think, "Our country is going down the tubes and we need God to come and turn us around. The Way of the Spirit is not a matter of hoping that the Spirit will take care of everything for us. Pentecost is a confession that God comes alongside us and works with us in all of our efforts which we consecrate to God.

We needn't beg and plead that God will do something for us, turn things around for us, work a miracle for us. No, we have the Pentecost promise that the Spirit surrounds us and fills us and calls us into the great work of our lives. All that we do in the name and energy of Christ's love will be blessed by the Spirit. It's a promise. We don't have to beg. We don't have to hope. It just is. The Spirit, the very presence, power, and action of God in creation and in humanity—this Spirit is working with us and in us.

But, if we listen carefully, quietly, hopefully for the Breath and Wind of God and lean our thoughts and hopes, prayers, and efforts into this love, into this peace, we will be well and whole. The life—the wind and breath of the Spirit will fill us and carry us to new places as the humble, mercy-filled children of God. Prayer: God, teach us to listen to and follow your Spirit, so that we may enjoy the fullness of the shared ministries of your Spirit. Thanks be to you, God. Amen.