

Kirby Lawrence Hill Abington Presbyterian Church
May 23, 2021 Pentecost
Romans 8:22-27
Acts 1:3-8; 2:1-21

WHAT'S NEXT?!

There is an evaluative tool called the Social Readjustment Rating Scale which seeks to measure the impact of stressors in one's life that might lead to resulting personal vulnerability. In using the tool, you can choose from a list of emotionally challenging events as to what you have encountered in the previous year. The list includes things like the death of a close friend, a change in living situation, uncertainty about the future, among others. The ratings suggest that if you come up with a score over 300, you have a high susceptibility to stress-related illness. ¹

It had been a harrowing time for Jesus' disciples. Just over the previous seven weeks, they had gone through experiencing a death, terrible loss, chronic fear, certain fatigue, along with significant anxiety about what the future would hold for them. It is a little hard to rate the stress level for the disciples – the test doesn't have the option for the stress induced when one of your closest friends is resurrected. But I put in events that they had been through just over the previous seven weeks, and their stress score would have been well over 400, which means they were all fortunate not to have had a heart attack or stroke. I dare say you and I might have also rated fairly high on this stress scale in the past year.

After Jesus' resurrection and before he ascended into heaven, knowing what his followers had been through, he urged them to wait in Jerusalem for when God's Spirit would be poured out upon them to enable them to carry out their calling. Somewhat like us, having gone through a traumatic time, they were waiting for what was next. It was on Pentecost morning that the Spirit came in a powerful way. Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks was a Jewish celebration fifty days after Passover. It marked the spring barley harvest. It also was a time to remember the giving of the ten commandments, the Mosaic law that was the unifying core of their Jewish identity. Unlike Passover, Pentecost was not to be a quiet family commemoration, but a time when all the people would come together to renew their connection to

God and to one another, to live out the intent of the commandments. So, there was quite a broadly diverse crowd of Jewish folks in Jerusalem that day, people whose point of origin was from various places all over the known world. As such, there were people who recognized a wide variety of languages.

Jesus' closest followers, the very people who had shown a significant lack of courage, unity, and common purpose when the confusing events of Jesus' execution took place, were in a waiting room of sorts that Pentecost morning. Within themselves, they clearly did not have what was needed to hold together as a group, much less become a world-changing organization. They were in dire need. Their leader was gone. They showed no capacity to carry forward his ministry. They were dead in the water. But the same God who brought Jesus back from the dead brought those who loved Jesus back to life as well. Mysteriously, wondrously, sounds of wind filled the room. Could it be the same as the wind of creation, the wind of God which once again was bringing something to life? Something that can't be seen, something that moves, something we feel, something whose effects we do see.

First there was wind. Then there was fire, yet another symbol of God's presence, going back to the story of the burning bush. Somehow, suddenly, they were on fire for God, filled with a desire to tell what had happened in Christ's coming, filled with a God-given ability to communicate that even across the normal bounds of languages. The disoriented, the tentative, the timid, the orphaned were filled with the same Spirit that had enlivened Jesus. The outpouring of God's Spirit upon them had more than just an interior effect on them. It actually moved them from just hanging out together to joyfully proclaiming and serving among the people. The Spirit of the resurrection suddenly took hold of them and they were utterly transformed, from wavering to focused, from fearful to a passionate boldness. Peter, who so recently couldn't bring himself to admit to one person in the middle of the night that he even knew Jesus, was now in the light of day publicly proclaiming that before thousands of people. He referred back to a promise in scripture from generations before that indicated what would happen when the Spirit of God was poured out upon the people. Young people would start to envision new possibilities. Even older folks wouldn't simply be reminiscing about what had

been, but would be actively dreaming of what could be. On Pentecost, when God's Spirit did come in a mighty way, the same good news that Jesus had embodied got communicated to a diverse crowd of people in ways they could understand even though they spoke many different languages.

Could it be that the wind of God is blowing still? Was it only a brief spark of a holy flame that appeared a long time ago? Or are there, by the Spirit of God, new connections with God and others that move us out of our experiences of stress to stress that there is good news God has for all? Something tells me that on this Pentecost Sunday, after this long period of waiting, that we aren't just observing the anniversary of the birth of a movement long ago and far away. Something tells me the Spirit of God is still needed around here and that, by God's grace, there is a wind that blows, a fire that burns in our midst.

So what may happen next? We don't know, but Someone who inspires dreams and visions, Someone who knows how to make something out of nothing, Someone who knows a thing or two about birth and life and resurrection and new beginnings, that Someone knows and will bring about something surprising and wondrous. The anniversary of our birthday – that would be worth celebrating. But this day may well be, by the power of the very Spirit of God, a new birth of God's love, God's presence, God's gifts coming in a whole new way. The wind of the Spirit still blows, the fire of God's love still burns. Amen.

¹ <https://www.simplypsychology.org/SRRS.html>

