

Baptismal Covenant Fanatics

June 4, 2006

(The Day of Pentecost - Year B)

Acts 2: 1-11

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

Alleluia! Christ is risen!
The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

The Day of Pentecost is a weird and strange day.
It is one of the main festival days in the church year, and yet we really
behave just about the same as we do on any other Sunday of the
year.

We do, however, wear red vestments, because red is the color of the
Holy Spirit and of fire.

And we do sing special hymns.

But, for the most part, Pentecost can seem pretty much just like any
other Sunday.

Yet, in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, Luke writes:

“When the day of Pentecost had come...suddenly from heaven there
came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, divided tongues of
fire...rested on each of them.

They were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other
languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”

No, this day of Pentecost was not your normal Sunday.

In fact, it was downright weird.

Years ago, when I was a member of St. John the Divine Episcopal
Church in Houston, the director of music at the church decided one
year to let us experience some of the weirdness of Pentecost.

So, when you came into the church that year on Pentecost, instead of
hearing the usual beautiful organ music,

They had set up huge speakers and a synthesizer and electronic
instruments, all making strange sounds together.

This music sounded like huge gusts of wind and a disturbing firestorm.

These sounds were loud, they were weird, and they were very disturbing.

Yet these strange sounds were probably more like the first Day of Pentecost than our usual hymns and melodic organ music.

And, you guessed it, there was such an uproar from people in the congregation about this disturbing and strange “Pentecost music,” That the next year on Pentecost, the synthesizers and speakers and electronic sounds were put away in favor of the more traditional and dignified ways of celebrating Pentecost, By singing proper English hymns such as “Hail Thee Festival Day” and “Come Down, O Love Divine.”

Why is it that we are so disturbed by Pentecost?

Why is it that we are so disturbed by the strange power of the Holy Spirit?

Maybe it is because we are a little afraid of the Holy Spirit.

Afraid that the Holy Spirit might turn us into some Pentecostal Holy Rollers, speaking in tongues, and wallowing on the floor.

Maybe we are afraid that the Holy Spirit might make us into a fanatic.

Yet I think, as Episcopalians, that most of us are so far away from being a fanatic, that it is almost laughable.

A few months ago, when I was still serving at St. Mary’s in Houston, I preached a sermon in which one of the lines in my sermon stated that we might be afraid that we might cross the line from being a good Christian to becoming a fanatic.

At a vestry meeting later that same week,

One of the members of the vestry shared with us that this line from my sermon had been on her mind all week long.

She shared with the vestry that she was worried that wearing her Daughters of the King cross to work might offend some of her co-workers, that maybe she talked about her faith too much at the office, that maybe she was seen by others as a Christian fanatic.

To which another woman on the vestry replied:

“Don’t worry, Karen, we’ll look out for ya.’

You just keep on doing what you’re doing, and if we think you’re becoming a fanatic, we’ll let ya’ know.”

In the Book of Acts, after the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit, they went out into the street, speaking in all these strange languages.

Parthians, Medes, Elamites (and all these nationalities whose pronunciation causes grief for lectors reading the scripture each year on Pentecost),

They all heard the disciples speaking about God’s deeds of power in their own languages.

And, with weird sounds coming out of their house,

Speaking in all these foreign tongues,

The response of the crowd was to laugh at the disciples and to assume that they were drunk, even though it was only nine o’clock in the morning.

The disciples sure looked like fanatics.

The Holy Spirit filled the disciples on that first Day of Pentecost, And Scripture says that those who welcomed the message of the Holy Spirit were baptized

And, that about 3000 persons were baptized on that one day.

Thus, Pentecost is a day especially appropriate for Baptisms.

And, we receive the *very same* Holy Spirit at OUR Baptism that the disciples received at Pentecost.

In the Baptism liturgy in *The Book of Common Prayer*, we say:

By “the water of Baptism, we are reborn by the Holy Spirit,”

We also say:

“You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever.”

For it is at our Baptism that we receive the Spirit and Power of Jesus,

which gives us the power to love others in ways that we could never do so using our own power.

As the Pentecostals would say:

We receive “Holy Ghost Power.”

But, it is our choice to either clam up, afraid of becoming a weirdo or a fanatic.

Or, to make a response, take a risk and to tap into that amazing power of love.

We choose to make a response at our Baptism by making several promises.

We call these promises the Baptismal Covenant.

In these promises, we say that we believe in one God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

In these promises, we say that, with God’s help, we will be faithful in prayer and worship,

That we will ask for forgiveness when we fall short,

That we will tell share our faith story with others,

That we will love other people,

That we will strive for justice and peace among all people.

And, at each and every Baptism that we witness,

We get to renew these Baptismal Vows.

But, since we do not have anyone being baptized at St. Alban’s today (That is, unless someone wants to be baptized right now),

Today, we will renew our own Baptismal Vows in place of saying the Nicene Creed.

For, the Day of Pentecost is a disturbing day, filled with weird noises, violent wind, tongues of fire, and people looking like drunk fanatics, speaking in other languages.

And, our response to this gift of the Holy Spirit given to us at our Baptism, is to renew the promises and vows we make in our Baptismal Covenant.

So, my challenge to each of you is this:

Live out the promises in your Baptismal Covenant.

Come to church every week.

Forgive each other.

Love everyone.

Share your story with other people.

Allow the disturbing power of the Holy Spirit to change your life.

And, don't worry.

If it looks like you are becoming a fanatic,

I'll let ya' know.

AMEN.

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