

“The Holy Gust”

Acts 2: 1-11

Today is Pentecost! The day the Church celebrates the arrival of the Holy Gust. You heard that right! I did say the Holy Gust. The words gust and ghost are derived from the same root word. That root described the sudden movement of wind that sends dust behind a plow into a whirligig, lifts the hat, and blows the leaves around. We can miss Pentecost if we think only of the gentle Holy Spirit and forget the Gust that swings us round to look on Jesus and redirect our ways.

On the morning of Pentecost, the place where Jesus’ followers were gathered was suddenly filled with a great gust of wind from Heaven. And everyone there was filled with power. God had sent the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus had promised, to empower their lives. God sends the Spirit, the Gust to empower our lives today. Looking to our lesson from the Acts of the Apostle’s this morning, we can see two things it takes to be empowered like that.

The first thing that will empower us is this: to get swung round by the Holy Gust. Getting swung round means getting turned toward God; focused daily on Jesus and being changed. Look at Peter! He spoke boldly on that first Pentecost day. Realize that this was the same Peter who had denied even knowing Jesus only a short while ago. This was the same Peter who was hiding behind locked doors after Jesus’ death, afraid for his own life. Suddenly, Peter was a new person. He had gone from impulsive fisherman to fearless evangelist. He had been turned around, focused daily on Jesus and changed by the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit has that same power to work in our lives, transforming fear into courage, despair into trust, restlessness into focused energy, and timidity into action. And there’s something else. Getting caught up in the Gust turns us round to see in the direction we need to see. Part of the Spirit’s purpose is to guide us.

Whether it shows or not, every priest and pastor depends on the Holy Spirit in the pulpit. I say 'whether it shows or not' because the Spirit is working with a very imperfect instrument in speaking through a preacher. I am reminded of the little girl who was watching her pastor/father as he was attempting to prepare a Sunday sermon.

"Daddy," she asked, "does God tell you what to say?"

"Well, yes in a way, he does dear," he replied. "Why do you ask?"

"I was just wondering," she said, "why you keep hitting the delete key."

I depend upon the Spirit when I am preparing and delivering a message. But the Holy Spirit is also working within you as you listen. That is, so that, even if I should stumble and falter, you can still receive God's word for you; not because you have heard my voice, but because you have heard the Spirit's voice from God within. But this guidance isn't just for clergy. It's for all of us, whatever you do: teachers in lesson planning, lawyers in case preparation, doctors nurses and health-care workers in medical practice, public service workers in their planning and delivery of those services, laborers in their labor; the Spirit will work through each of us, and within those we work with and for, if we will let ourselves be swung round and daily focused to see as guided by the Spirit.

And here's something else: The Spirit's work isn't just for you and me as individuals. Getting swung round also changes us as the church. The Spirit is the source of our strength. Remember when Jesus told Simon Peter that he would be the rock on which Jesus would build his church? Jesus said then that even the gates of Hell would not prevail against it. For years growing up, I viewed the church as a kind of fortress with the world and the powers of evil beating against its gates. I can remember the sermons with their exhortations to stand fast against the world's assaults and to watch and defend the walls of the faith that encouraged that imagery. For that matter, you can still hear such imagery in many

sermons today. But that's a twisted image. That's not at all what Jesus is saying. Jesus is saying that Evil is the fortress, and the Church is the one with the battering ram. The gates of the hells of poverty, of intolerance, of hate, of cruelty, and power-mongering madness-Hell cannot stand up to the concerted assault of a Spirit empowered church. In the face of all the social injustice and the burning uprisings happening now, that is our calling; not to be safe and defensive, but to boldly go into the world and transform all the fortified pockets of hell with the love, the acceptance, the healing touch of the outreaching care of God in Jesus. We are empowered for change and guidance as we are swung round by the Holy Gust.

Here's the other thing that will empower us: Become an encourager of each other. Look at the first Pentecost. The church was empowered as they were all together. That was their custom. They ate together, they prayed together, they sang together, that's how they encouraged each other; how they put courage into each other.

Now, I know that it could be easily asked, "How do we do that with a closed church?" Here's the answer to that. We can do that, we are doing that, because the church isn't closed. Yes, the buildings are closed for now, and will be for a little longer, but we are not closed. Worship, Sunday School, and fellowship may be changed during this time of sequestering and social distancing, but none of it has ended. Did you know that far more people are joining us for worship on Sundays than before we closed the doors. Those viewers are not only local, but they are Coast to Coast and in-between, and even International as well. And we are providing more opportunities to gather for worship and prayer and face-to-face fellowship on-line than we have ever done. Right now, even as we are planning for reopening, and restoring the ways we have always been the Church, we are continuing, and will continue, to find new ways to be the Church. So, bear with us, and be with us now. Log in to the worship and fellowship

gatherings as much as you can. Doing this will encourage your faith and strengthen you in your spiritual walk. But even more, you just showing up, letting yourself be seen and heard, will encourage everyone else who will get to see you.

A Neuropsychologist did a study, not long ago, on the energy levels in children. He found that when children are given a word of encouragement, no matter how tired they may be at the time, an immediate upsurge in new energy will register in their brains. However, when even well rested children are criticized or discouraged, their energy levels will nose-dive. My guess is that those results are replicated in adults. When we are encouraged, our energy levels go up. When we are discouraged our energy levels go down. One of the most important ministries you and I can engage in is to become an encourager; someone who puts courage into others, wherever you are. You can do that even now, just by logging in during the week, and letting others see you and hear you.

Now, after more than a hundred years since his death, Episcopal priest and Bishop, Phillips Brooks is still considered to be the most beloved clergyman in the City of Boston's history. One day a Harvard University professor sought out Phillips Brooks. The professor had a serious problem and needed help. He spent an hour with Brooks and came out a changed person. Later it dawned on him that he hadn't even asked Brooks about his problem. He wrote later on, "I did not care; I had found out that what I needed was not the solution to a special problem, but the contagion of a triumphant spirit."

I love that phrase, "the contagion of a triumphant spirit." A triumphant spirit is contagious. That was the contagion with which Simon Peter stood up to address the throng on Pentecost. This is a contagion we want to catch. This is one potential pandemic the world desperately needs. So, get swung round by the Spirit to focus daily on Jesus.

Become an encourager, putting courage into others. We will catch the contagion of the Spirit. There is no limit to how far and deep we will spread it. That is the promise of Pentecost. That is the power of the Holy Gust.