

May 15, 2016
Rev. Diane Monti-Catania

Sermon - "Come Holy Spirit, Come"

Come Holy Spirit, Come!

Come among us as a mighty wind that clears the air and leaves all things feeling fresh and new.

Burn the debris in our lives and leave us with a clean slate, ready to begin anew.

Let us listen to the prophecies of our sons and our daughters;

Let us hear the dreams of young and old in language that we all understand.

Happy Pentecost!

Today is a day of joy.

Today is a day of wonder and awe.

A day that we remember that this is the church of all the people.

There have been manifestations, remarkable displays of God's Spirit in the Bible before, of course, with sound and light and amazing "special effects," as we call them today.

But those events, like Moses on the mountaintop and Jesus transfigured, were reserved for only a few witnesses, the most inside of insiders.

Here, at the dawn of a new era, on the birthday of a church called to spread to the ends of the earth, the display is for everyone.

Not just the holiest or the most faithful or the most learned, not just the believers, not just those who were with Jesus on the road or witnesses to his Resurrection.

No, in this case, at this moment, "all flesh," male and female, old and young, slave and free, are invited and included — and not just invited but expected to prophesy and dream, too!

A perfect day to welcome our new covenant partners into the life of our church.

When I look out at our seven confirmands, as well as at all the new members of this church over the past five years, I see hope for the future.

I see promise of new life for both the church and the world.

I share theologian Phyllis Tickle's perception that this is a time of great renewal for the church and all the churches.

This is a time of opportunity for re-examination of the fundamental questions of our faith.

This is a time for re-commitment to a renewed living of our faith.

Last week we had the opportunity to bless and welcome Charlie Magowan into the life of our church.

Today we welcomed Caleb, Maggie, Hannah, Cora, Taylor, Colin, Charlotte, Ben, Sarah and Cory.

Each person brings the gift of themselves to this community.

Our lives will be changed by widening our circle and welcoming each new person.

We are different now than we were just yesterday.

Each new person, each new perspective, each potential prophet changes us as the body of Christ.

It is a good change.

We see the spirit in a new light.

We learn to hear God's voice with new ears.

Perhaps the oldest mistake we make with the telling of the Pentecost story is to speak of it as the Spirit's "coming" – as if God's Spirit was absent from the world before this.

Jesus gives us a clue to a different understanding, though, when he says that "the world cannot receive him because it isn't looking for him..."

Pentecost is essentially a breakthrough in our human capacity to apprehend and experience God's activity which is (and always has been) active in all of creation (including us).

At Pentecost we learn to look for God's Spirit – and the readings for today make it clear that God's Spirit can be seen and found anywhere and everywhere we look.

This new awareness helps us to remember that God is everywhere.

When we accept this new awareness of God's Spirit we find that we all speak a common Spirit-enabled language – the language of God-imagined, Spirit-filled, humanity.

Once our eyes are opened to see God's Spirit in all things, including those who are different from us, who are hostile toward us, and who are most repulsive to us, everything changes.

We know ourselves and all creatures– as God's children and siblings of one another.

Pentecost is a wake up call for our world.

Imagine how different our politics, economics and environmental policies would be if we recognized God's Spirit in all things, and if we took time to really learn our common language?

Imagine if we listened to every person with the intensity of understanding a prophet.

Peter's sermon to the gathered crowd in Jerusalem does more than name the notion of prophecy.

It also demonstrates it.

We learn what prophecy is by watching him do it.

Peter does not speak of prophecy as predicting the future.

Instead, prophecy is truth-telling.

It is naming the places and ways where God intervenes or initiates in the world.

It is a component of proclaiming the word of God and identifying God's grace at work in our lives.

From Peter's reference to Joel, we see that prophecy speaks to the *present* time, while finding promises and images from the *past*.

We honor tradition while we discern what God is saying to us today – in this moment in time.

Peter draws from prior testimony about God's activity using ideas and promises that point toward the *future*.

Today, we welcome our youngest members amidst a celebration that started two millennia ago.

We stand on a firm foundation, looking forward, with awe and wonder at what God might be doing in our lives today, as well as tomorrow.

Last evening, at the confirmand dinner, Barbara Collins closed her remarks with this piece of prayerful advice:

Look back and thank God.

Look forward and trust God.

Look around and serve God.

Look within and find God.