

From the Bishop

*And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting (Acts 2:2).*

What does it mean to be a Spirit-led Church?

The Opening Worship for our Synod Assembly will use the texts for Pentecost Sunday. We are reminded we are pentecostal people. We either have the Spirit, are led by the Spirit or we are nothing. Says the Psalmist: *when you take away your breath, O God, we die and return to dust. But when you send forth your spirit, you renew the whole earth.* Without the liveliness of the Holy Spirit we are left to ourselves.

What I notice about the Scriptures is how unsettling the Spirit is. The Holy Spirit came upon those first disciples with tongues of fire and the crowd was bewildered. People were amazed and astonished and some did not want to believe it was even the work of the Spirit. These men were tippin' the bottle a little early. Peter tries to assure everyone by quoting Joel about young and old having dreams and visions. But when people in the pew start doing these things, only early adopters get excited. Most of us get nervous! These are unsettling activities that move us from the ordinary and routine and out of our comfort zone.

Another thing I notice about Pentecost is how the Spirit moves people away from their inward focused communities. The Spirit propels people outward and into the world. Disciples speak languages they never spoke before. People separated by tongues were suddenly united by the Spirit's work. Peter says when the Spirit is poured out something happens that is much bigger than ourselves. There are portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below. Paul puts it this way: all creation has been groaning in labor pains, and not only creation but we ourselves are waiting for adoption, for the redemption of our bodies.

We know there are challenges before the Church in North America. We know our membership has been growing older and we are not effectively reaching beyond our denominational walls and touching the lives of people. I wonder if we are ready for Pentecost among us, ready for old hearts to be stirred in fresh ways and young and old to be caught up with dreams and visions. Pentecost is about empowering and creativity and being open to God's future. Without the Spirit the story of Jesus remains locked in history, something we remember and think about and reflect upon. But when the Spirit of Jesus comes to dwell among us and within us, then we become little Christs here and now.

As we meet in assembly this week, I pray the Holy Spirit to come upon us with power and for hearts and minds to be open and ready for the unsettling but promising work of the Spirit of God.