

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. 2And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. 4All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.

5Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. 6And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. 7Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? 9Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, 11Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power." 12All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, "What does this mean?" 13But others sneered and said, "They are filled with new wine."

14But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them, "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. 15Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o'clock in the morning. 16No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: 17'In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. 18Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy. 19And I will show portents in the heaven above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and smoky mist. 20The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the coming of the Lord's great and glorious day. 21Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

A violent wind – you hear the sound of it and when it has passed things are not the same – buildings damaged – trees uprooted – branches and leaves littered everywhere. Sometimes houses and businesses flattened - destroyed – people and animals injured, pierced – killed. A violent wind.

Fire – crackling, racing, consuming – out of control – choosing where it wants to go – hot – burning – destroying. Whole structures devoured leaving only smoldering ashes. Fire.

The Holy Spirit could have come down that day as a flock of doves, gentle – peace-filled – gracious. On the day of Jesus baptism that is how it was.

The Holy Spirit could have entered them as it had that Easter evening when Jesus suddenly appeared among them and breathed the Holy Spirit into them.

But on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit appeared with a sound like the rush of a violent wind and by divided tongues as of fire. But instead of destruction – a scattering – a searing, the Holy Spirit became a tongue of fire resting on each of the disciples. They were given words – human words – common words. Luke tells us that there were Jews from every nation under heaven in Jerusalem at that time and that each heard them speaking in the everyday language of the hearers. Not in some heavenly holy language for insiders but God's Spirit seeking out

people from every nation – meeting them in their own language. That day was a first sampling – a foretaste of a feasting on God’s word that even today is spreading - every people, every language under heaven hearing the word about Jesus.

Wind – all our energy problems would be solved if we could but harness all the violent winds of the world. Or the wild fires that burn out of control. The institutional church has always wanted to harness the Holy Spirit so we could put God to work for us. I would like to tell you where the Spirit is and where the Spirit is not – how you can send God off to fetch every stick you throw but the Holy Spirit comes to blow through us that we might fetch every stick that God throws. A man named Saul or Paul sets off to Damascus to destroy the church of Jesus Christ but by the time the Holy Spirit has done its work Paul is gathering believers in Corinth and Ephesus, in Rome and Athens and Philippi.

So what might this Holy Spirit do in you – through you? Who knows? One of you talked to me this week about trying to find jobs for people coming out of prison – next week many of you will be telling children about God and listening to the children – helping the children - making crafts with the children – playing games with the children– singing and dancing and feeding the children. The Holy Spirit will be wind and fire among us – surprising us – blessing you and blessing others through you.

I hope that some among us will be surprised that they are giving money for nets for children and families they will never see. I trust that some of you will be speaking to co-workers about God’s power and God’s care in their time of trial. For others among us enemies will become friends. Others will serve or give in ways they cannot imagine now.

Luke tells us that the apostles were all together in one place when the sound like the rush of a violent wind filed their ears. Luke tells us that they had been gathering for some time and had been constantly devoting themselves to prayer.

Gathering, praying together, hearing the word, sharing the supper – in this way we are readied for the fire from heaven to descend upon us. And when the fire burns hot we are sent out. That was Jesus word to his disciples. That Easter evening when he breathed the Holy Spirit into them, he declared, “As the Father has sent me so I send you.”

Filled with the Holy Spirit you are sent with the same love that was in Jesus. I can no more predict what that will mean for the world than I can predict where wind will blow or fire will burn. But I am certain that love will be the mark of the Spirit’s working in you - love for those who do not deserve that love. For that is what the Father sent the Son to bring – love for those who do not deserve God’s love – forgiveness for those who have no excuse.

As the Father has sent me so I send you. Amen.