

PENTECOST C POWER FOR TODAY Acts 2:1-21

The Rev. Terri Pilarski tells of a family that arrived on a warm June day: a mother, grandmother, and five children ranging in ages from 17 to 3. As they scrambled out of the van, it was apparent just how tired they were. Some time ago this family had traveled from a refugee camp in Cameroon to Darfur, Sudan. There they caught a plane that flew them to Paris, then to the United States. The littlest ones were teary-eyed and clingy, hanging on to the bone-thin hand of their grandmother. The mother and older children had that glazed look that comes from extreme fatigue. This family, refugees from war-torn Rwanda, was being placed by the local resettlement agency. A house had been acquired, but necessary renovations were still in progress. So for the next few days the family would live in the church.

The church had spare rooms not being used over the summer, rooms that had been hastily converted from Sunday school rooms into bedrooms and a living room. Downstairs was a full kitchen, and the bathrooms contained showers. The family would be comfortable and have a relative degree of privacy in their temporary home.

The afternoon of their arrival, members of the church greeted the family and gave them a tour of the church. The family spoke a native dialect of Rwanda and a little French, but no English. A translator, a former refugee from Rwanda and now an employee of the resettlement agency, followed the tour, interpreting for the family. "Here is the kitchen. This is a gas oven. You light it this way. Be careful. Here are the pots and pans and dishes. Watch the children outside, do not let them run off the property; cars will zoom by fast, they could be hurt. There is food in the fridge; don't eat the rabbits in the yard or the birds." It was clear that this family was in a whole new world. Before the tour was over, most of the family members had found and claimed a bed and fallen asleep.

Over the next week, the family fell into a rhythm with the life of the parish. During office hours the family was usually still sleeping, their biological clocks still set several time zones away, on the other side of the world. Later in the afternoon they would rise and begin their day. Slowly over the week their hours shifted. By Sunday they were able to worship with the Korean Methodist Church that shared the building with the Episcopal congregation. It was an amazing sight: a Methodist service spoken in Korean, held in an American Episcopal Church, attended by Rwandans in full African attire.

At the lunch that followed, a few members of both the Episcopal and Methodist congregations were able to speak with the family in sparse French. It seems French was a common language in the refugee camp and now a common language shared among this diverse group of Koreans, Americans, and Rwandans gathered for a meal.

Members of the church dropped by during the week to bring the kids some things to play with: soccer balls, used bikes, tennis rackets and balls, and sidewalk chalk. The kids were delighted, and ran gleefully off to play. Laughter filled the air, another common language that knows no boundaries.

Six days after their arrival, the house was ready, and the family prepared to move out of the church. A large van arrived to take their few belongings, three suitcases for seven people. Plus seven beds with bed linens, two scooters, two bikes, and a few balls donated by the church: The sum total of their possessions.

Members of the church helped them pack. As the family loaded the last of their things, the daughter turned and offered the priest a few gifts – a small wooden picture with strands of colored wheat, and two coasters with psalms inscribed – gifts a nun had helped them make in the refugee camp in Cameroon. A family with virtually nothing, and yet they came bearing gifts of gratitude. Thankfulness, another common language shared.

One parish member and his son drove the van and helped the family move into their house. With the family gone, the church seemed quieter than ever. Lingering aromas from the fragrant meals remained, but otherwise all was quiet. The church learned a profound lesson that week, a lesson about giving, sharing, and living in an abundant yet simple way.

Despite all the differences of language, and culture, and food, and customs, a bond was formed. Regardless of the inability to really speak to one another, the church members and the family members were able to communicate a shared compassion for one another and a common love of God. It was truly an experience of the Holy Spirit moving in and through them all.

Our reading today from Acts points us in this same direction. We hear that the disciples have all gathered in one place, people from all over the region, people all speaking different languages. And then a rush of wind, unlike ordinary wind, energized and fiery as only the Holy Spirit

can be, comes and fills them with a sensation that changes them forever. Suddenly they have the ability to hear and understand one another. The room is electric. They stand confused, astonished, and conscious of what has happened, God was in that wind. What an awesome experience it must have been.

On this Pentecost Sunday, we celebrate the arrival of the Holy Spirit. Upon leaving this world, Jesus has let loose the Holy Spirit. The disciples describe this experience as a wind, as tongues of fire. Hildegard of Bingen has a slightly different way of describing the presence of the Holy Spirit. In this translation from Stephen Mitchell's anthology of poetry, *The Enlightened Heart*, we hear her description:

Holy Spirit,
Giving life to all life,
Moving all creatures,
Root of all things,
Washing them clean,
Wiping out their mistakes,
Healing their wounds,
You are our true life,
Luminous, wonderful,
Awakening the heart
From its ancient sleep.

What does the Holy Spirit *do* in our lives today? What does the Holy Spirit *want* to do in our lives today? How do we know when we are allowing the Holy Spirit to operate in our lives?

It seems to me that God gives the *presence* of the Holy Spirit to us as a constant reminder that God is with us. The Holy Spirit comes not just to comfort us, but also to *change* us; for the love of God will do that – change us from the inside out, and awaken us in new ways, even when we do not understand how or why. The Holy Spirit is wild: wind and fire are wild images. The Holy Spirit troubles our need to control, to avoid surprises and be moved outside of our comfort zone. But the Holy Spirit is also gentle. There is the image of the dove that symbolizes peace—not just calm but reconciliation with God and all of God's people. Jesus, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, is indeed the Prince of Peace! And you, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, are the Princes and Princesses of Peace!

Through Jesus' becoming human and living among us, we are taught that God is *active* in your lives and mine. In giving us the Holy Spirit, Christ is showing us that God intends to work in and through us to bring forth God's hopes and dreams. This God of ours continues to create in ways beyond our understanding.

Do you know the Holy Spirit as a fiery breath of wind? Or a presence that awakens your heart? Or as the "still small voice" that nudges you to listen to God? Or the voice that you might find *yourself* using to speak to someone else in need? Or as burning and washing away the resentment inside you toward those you had considered your enemies? Or helping you to become familiar with a strange new land that you didn't choose on your own accord? Or all of the above? In all these ways and more, Pentecost reminds us that the Holy Spirit is Christ's *gift* to us.

The Holy Spirit is given to us in baptism and wants to shape us by a life of faith. The Holy Spirit showers us with gifts that are intended to be shared – including gifts of generosity and hospitality offered with God's help. Our baptismal covenant reminds us that *the acts of caring and sharing enable us to participate in God's creative worldwide energy.*

With gratitude for the God who has given us life, the Holy Spirit invites us to open our hearts to the world around us, beginning right here where we live, offering hospitality to those we meet, friend and stranger alike.

Holy Spirit,
Giving life to all life,
Moving all creatures,
Root of all things,
Washing them clean,
Wiping out their mistakes,
Healing their wounds,
You are our true life,
Luminous, wonderful,
Awakening the heart
From its ancient sleep.