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Trinity Episcopal Church

Acts 2: 1 – 21
Romans 8: 14 – 17

Psalm 104: 25 - 35, 37
John 14: 8 – 17 (25 – 27)

A little over 25 years ago, my priest asked me if I wanted to go to a Cursillo weekend down at Honey Creek. I'm not sure why I said yes, because I hadn't ever done a weekend retreat, and I didn't see myself as all that churchy. But I went.

It was a challenging weekend because I was full of resistance that I didn't even know I had in me. That weekend was the beginning of a period of God speaking to me in pictures or visual metaphors. I shared one of those with the EfM group a couple of weeks ago. It was like I was looking at a child's coloring book picture of a man trying to lead a donkey with a bridle and rope, only the donkey had its hooves firmly dug into the ground, pushing back. There was a voice without a voice that said to me, "You're not the man." A second picture came a little later. It was of me sitting right where I was in the chapel. In the picture, I was leaning over, picking up concrete blocks and building a tower, a fortification, a line of defense, around me. I am firmly convinced that God speaks whatever language it takes to contravene our roadblocks, our lines of defense.

Cursillo weekends begin on Thursday evenings and end on Sunday afternoons. By Saturday evening, which I think was when these two pictures happened, I was extremely uncomfortable and uncharacteristically angry. I had no idea where all of that was coming from. I wanted to run away from Cursillo, but I couldn't. I had ridden there with three other women from the church, so I had no way home. God thinks of everything. After reading C. S. Lewis' Screwtape Letters several years ago, I now look back on that weekend and see it as Wormwood's last hurrah in me. Well, hopefully last.

Sunday morning was no better. I wanted out of there as soon as possible. Lunchtime came and went. Shortly after lunch, Zibi Davidson, the wife of Ron Davidson, who at the time was the rector of Trinity, Statesboro, gave a talk. Something in what she said, and even more in the piece of music she played, suddenly pierced through my defensiveness and my stubbornness. Suddenly, I realized that no matter what I had done or hadn't done, I was indeed a child of God, loved and accepted as I had never known before.

That weekend, and specifically that moment on Sunday afternoon, will forever be a turning point for me. I said "Yes," to *God* this time, not quite knowing what I was letting myself in for. When we left that afternoon, I was given a little card. A Cursillo weekend is not the be-all-to-end-all. It's only the beginning, the beginning of how you live your "fourth day," the rest of your life. The little card helps with that. When you come back from Cursillo, you meet weekly in a little reunion group, basically a support group for living the Christian life. The card contains the format for the meetings and begins with these two prayers which are said in unison by the group:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created. And you shall renew the face of the earth.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that by the same Holy Spirit, we may be truly wise and ever enjoy his consolations, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Those prayers are an invitation to the Holy Spirit to be present, and a reminder to the participants to be open to the movement of the Spirit. “Come, Holy Spirit!” is a reflection of our deepest human longings and desires for transformation and holiness, that is, having a purpose in God’s world. We recognize the need for change in this world at our deepest level. But we also recognize the impossibility of our doing this in accordance with God’s will and without God’s help. I’ve told you about my Cursillo experience in order to say that all things are indeed possible with God and that the Holy Spirit can undeniably work amazing things in us and through us. The Holy Spirit is very real and very much at work in our world and in our daily experiences.

That weekend, the Holy Spirit began renewing me, began transforming me and changing how I look at the world. And that is the very same Holy Spirit that comes sweeping down like a whirlwind upon the disciples, ten days after they watch Jesus ascend into the heavens. It is the very same Holy Spirit that enables the disciples to speak the Good News in the native language of each of the Jews from the diaspora who are in Jerusalem for the Jewish Feast of Pentecost.

So often it seems, we relegate things like that to the category of myth – not necessarily something that is fabricated, but rather in a literary sense that it is a story that speaks a universal truth, whether it really happened quite like that or not. We don’t really expect the Holy Spirit to come dancing down on top of our heads with the flames of God’s passion and power. But maybe we should.

Walter Brueggeman writes that “we all have a call, a stunning vocation, to stand free and hope-filled in a world gone fearful...and to think, imagine, dream, vision a future that God will yet enact.” We are not in charge, all seeming evidence to the contrary. God is in charge. But, as Christians, we are called to not only imagine that, but to trust in it, to live in it, to participate in it and to share that Good News with all God’s children. Mark Suriano writes that it’s easy to give in to the same impulses we feel around us – to stubbornly resist, to build defenses, to look out only for ourselves and the people we care about, to seek security in power and wealth and ‘stuff,’ to think we know best how to do this. But then comes the Holy Spirit, blowing through our lives, turning everything upside down. While we want a safe, secure faith that is comfortable, the Holy Spirit does away with all that, challenging us and our assumptions, opening our eyes to a new way of seeing the world, envisioning a new creation filled with possibility and hope.

A number of “theobloggers” (people who blog about God) were asked to respond to the question, “In 100 words or less, how might the Holy Spirit be at work in the world today?” Here are a few of the responses:

[Monica Coleman, Associate Professor of Constructive Theology and African American Religions at Claremont School of Theology:](#)

*When we put the gospel to hip hop and host U2charists
 When we share the church building with the Korean congregation
 When we preach against homophobia
 When we break bread with Muslims and Jews
 When the teenagers lead worship on a regular Sunday
 (not just youth day)
 When we invoke the ancestors and learn from their lives
 When we live at the borders offering water to those in the desert,
 harbor to those in danger and community when we don't fit in...
 It is then we speak in tongues."*

Sam Hamilton-Poore, Director of the Program in Christian Spirituality and Adjunct Professor at San Francisco Theological Seminary:

"Closer to us than our own breath and breathing, the Risen Christ fills us with his own Spirit - - quietly, intimately. With this breath, this power, we then go about the everyday, unspectacular, grubby work of forgiveness. Breathe, forgive; breath, forgive; breath, forgive. Although we often long for the dazzling or spectacular, we live in a time, a world, in need of people who breathe in, regularly, the quiet power and grace of Christ's Spirit - - and people who, likewise, breathe out, regularly, the power and grace of forgiveness. Our world - so spectacularly broken and burning - needs people for whom reconciliation is as normal and natural as breathing."

Carl Gregg, Associate Pastor at Northminster Church, Monroe, LA:

The Spirit is at work wherever there is community. The Spirit is at work wherever there is gratitude. The Spirit is at work wherever there are "sighs too deep for words." The Spirit is at work wherever there is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control," for these are the fruits of the Spirit. The Spirit is at work as the "whole creation groans in labor pains" birthing new life. The Spirit is at work wherever "young people prophesy" against injustice and "see visions" of hope and wherever elders still "dream dreams" of a better world.

Amy Julia Becker, a writer and a graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary:

In nudges and whispers. Like a seed growing, imperceptible at first. Like wind, invisible, refreshing, transformative. Like water, cleansing, renewing, powerful. Unpredictably. Uncontrollably. Praying: for us, with us, in us, through us. Convicting like a judge in a courtroom. Comforting, like a mother with a frightened child in the middle of the night. We know her work by experiencing it. She will not be pinned down, can only be described with analogies. But wherever there is forgiveness, redemption, reconciliation, grace, she leaves her fingerprints. Always the one connecting making us into the Body of Christ, God's hands in the world.

Bryan Wade, Vice Moderator of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and a Presbyterian pastor in Raleigh, NC:

Many people question if the Holy Spirit is at work in the world today. Put on some different eyes and see –

- *The claiming of an infant in baptism*
- *The faith of a spouse in the loss of a loved one*
- *The building of a Habitat for Humanity home*
- *Strangers assisting in areas of natural disaster*
- *The grace exhibited to one another after a difficult discussion*
- *And the ability to awaken to see a new day...*

Then you can say the Holy Spirit is at work.

How might you or I answer the question: In 100 words or less, how is the Holy Spirit at work in the world today? I invite each of us to the challenge of coming up with our own answers to that question. I'd like to close with a Litany for Pentecost (from *Worship Resources for Pentecost*, p.1). There are three petitions and after each one, your response is, "Come Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation." Let us pray.

Pour out your Holy Spirit, O God, upon all people of all nations. Inspire your sons and daughters to prophesy your gracious love for all creation. Fill the young with visions of justice and peace. Let the old dream dreams of healing for your wounded world.

Come, Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation.

Pour out your Holy Spirit, O God, upon the leaders of the world. Open their ears to the groans of creation. Move them with compassion for the poor and the suffering. Awaken in them a vision of a new heaven and a new earth.

Come, Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation.

Pour out your Holy Spirit, O God, upon your church in every place. In a world broken by unshared bread, you call us to offer the body of Christ. Where blood is spilled between neighbors and nations, you invite us to share the blood of Christ. In a world where hope is fragile, you wash us with water for the healing of the nations and the saving of our souls. Help us, O God, to be your church, in spirit and in truth.

Come, Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation.

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