

Filled with the Spirit! Filled with the Holy Spirit! Filled with the Spirit of God! In today's gospel the disciples are filled with the Holy Spirit. Are you filled with the Holy Spirit? I certainly hope so! A few years ago a fellow Lutheran came to me and said, "I know God and Jesus are important, but I don't know why we need the Holy Spirit." I was stunned. I tried to remain calm and give an explanation. Since then, I have realized that we don't talk about the Holy Spirit enough.

Take a look at the person on your right and then the person on your left. What do you think? Are they filled with the Spirit? Look them again and this time tell them—"You are filled with the Holy Spirit!" We received the Holy Spirit at our baptism.

Now, let me continue with the phrase. "filled with the Holy Spirit". The book of Acts says that Jesus' disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit" on that first Pentecost. There were people from many nations there—people who spoke many different languages. So, the Spirit gave the disciples the ability to speak in all of those languages so that all of those people could hear the Gospel preached in their own language.

The crowd was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in their native language. Pentecost reverses the curse of the Babel story, in which the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. Some of the nations are located in modern day Turkey or Iraq. Two (Egypt and Libya) are in northern Africa. Crete is an island in the Mediterranean. John mentions Judea, the Province in which Jerusalem is located, and Rome. He also mentions Arabs, who would come from the east and the south. To see the scope of the nations involved, look at a modern map of the areas. Start with Rome and move east to Turkey—then move south and east through Iraq and Saudi Arabia—then move west through Egypt and Libya—and then move north across the Mediterranean to Rome. You will find that you have traced a rough circle with Judea and Jerusalem at the center.

Some of the listeners were amazed and receptive, but others said, "They are filled with new wine"—in other words, drunk. There are always people like that, aren't there? Scoffers Unbelievers! People who wouldn't believe no matter what! But these disciples weren't filled with new wine. They were filled with the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of God! Pentecost is also known as the Feast of Harvest. It is not accidental, of course, that the birth of the church, this great 'harvest' of souls, should occur on this important (harvest) festival.

Pentecost is also known as the Feast of Weeks. Jews were required to observe the Feast of Weeks fifty days after the offering of the barley sheaf at the

Feast of Unleavened Bread. It says, “You shall count until the day after the seventh sabbath, fifty days; then you shall present an offering of new grain to the Lord.” Thus the feast became known as the Feast of Weeks, because the countdown was seven sabbaths—seven weeks—a week of weeks.

The Jews living in and near Jerusalem were required to attend and Jews from other nations made the pilgrimage as they were able. As many as 180,000 people attended each year and two thirds of them were from foreign lands.

Imagine being in the middle of that crowd and suddenly from the heaven came a sound like the rush of a violent wind. Divided tongues as of fire, appeared among them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. Christians had retreated into hiding after the crucifixion and waited quietly for God to act. Now the time has come! The heavens roar! Fire burns! The Spirit of God fills! Disciples preach! Crowds wonder! The first gift of the Spirit is the gift of speech, the gift of speech in different languages, and the first fruit of the Spirit is the gift of proclamation! All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit. This is a theme that reoccurs throughout the book of Acts.

At the conclusion of his Pentecost sermon, Peter says, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The gift of the Spirit is not a gift for special believers only, but is instead a gift to all within the believing community. The example of those first disciples at Pentecost offers a lesson for us today. Our first order of business should be proclamation! The church has a responsibility to teach the scriptures to children and adults. The Spirit who brought life to the first Christian Pentecost continues to bring life to the church today.

When I was growing up I remember singing a song that had a strange word in it—that word was--Paraclete. What in the world is a paraclete? It's from the Greek word parakletos. It means comforter, counselor, encourager, advocate. It is the Holy Spirit. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would come to be with the disciples after he was gone. The Holy Spirit would help them in their work, comfort them in their times of trial, and encourage them in their daily walk with God.

So, what does that have to do with us today, over 2,000 years later? Well, Pentecost is the birthday of the church. That day the Spirit came with wind and fire and although we may not have the wind and fire, the Holy Spirit continues to bring life to the church today.

There's a story about some surveyors who were sent to a remote mountain to design a new map of the area. Everyday they would go up and over the rugged hills

and every night return to their camp. Usually they were joined by an old shepherd who enjoyed the companionship sitting around their fire at night. They would swap stories and tell of their daily adventures up on the mountain. The old shepherd insisted that he would accompany the surveyors the next day so they wouldn't get lost, they asked why he felt he needed to go along. The shepherd quietly insisted, "I must go with you for I know the mountains like the back of my hand. If I don't go, you will get lost." The surveyors were aggravated by his insistence. They said, "We now have a map made of the area. We don't need you to go along. We can do it by ourselves." The shepherd said, "But there is no fog on your map."

The two experts went up the mountain early the next morning by themselves. Soon a thick fog came and they were LOST! They wandered all around that mountain and became exhausted. Suddenly out of the fog, the old shepherd appeared beside them and led them home through the fog.

Can we relate to this story? We feel so sure of ourselves that we are strong enough to go up and over the rugged hills of life day after day all by ourselves. Although we sometimes choose to go it alone, the Holy Spirit gently calls to us, "I must go with you." Sometimes we ignore the Spirit because we have made our own maps to chart out our life's pathway. Our guide and comforter, the Holy Spirit dwells in our presence and as we celebrate the day of Pentecost, remember the words of John, "The Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

And finally – The Holy Spirit is with you! May you love and worship God, with all your heart and soul and might. May you be one with Christ and continue to witness God's love in your daily life. May you be sustained in times of waiting. And may the Holy Spirit be your help, your strength, your guide, your comforter, and your encourager. Amen.