

## The Day of Pentecost Year A 11 May 2008

[Numbers 11:24-30](#)

[Acts 2:1-21](#)

[John 20:19-31](#)

He was just plain tired. Tired of the incessant whining, tired of the low-intensity rebellion, the nasty looks, the sighs, the conversations halted mid-sentence when he walked by. It wasn't good enough that he had brought them out of Egypt. It wasn't good enough that he found them water or that manna dripped every morning from every bush along every rocky path. Now they wanted meat.

And he was tired of it all. Tired of leadership, tired of fighting with them and fighting with Yahweh. Tired of trying to keep Joshua from slaughtering the insurgents and tired of wondering if he'd die in his tent with a knife between his shoulder blades. So he did what great leaders do when faced with a revolt that could end their hold on power.

He threw a temper tantrum.

Fortunately, he did it in the presence of the Lord of the Universe, who expects that kind of behavior from his prophets. After Moses stopped to take an enraged breath, Yahweh just smiled. "Moses, calm down a bit, will you. I'll get you some help. Take seventy elders and go into the Tent of Meeting."

So Moses dragged the Seventy into the Tent, where the Holy Light shone above the Ark of the Covenant and a wondrous thing happened: they started to tremble. Someone started clapping. Someone started singing in a low, soft moan. Someone started dancing. And before you could say "Hallelujah" the Holy Light was shining all over that Tent. The Seventy started talking just like Moses. There were now 71 prophets to lead the people. And Moses forgot all about his fatigue.

And that's when General Joshua showed up, puzzled and grim. Somehow the Holy Light had bounced out of the Tent and wound up splashing all over two young men who weren't part of the Seventy. And a wondrous thing

happened: Eldad and Medad were bouncing all over the place, singing the strange new song, and talking just like the Great Prophet himself.

Now Joshua was a soldier, the type of no-nonsense Army man who knows trouble when he sees it, and this was trouble. You just can't have anybody who thinks he or she is called to be a prophet mouthing off and telling people what God thinks. You need order. You need control. His right hand twitched around the hilt of his sword. "Moses, sir, you've got to stop them before everybody and his uncle thinks they're prophets."

But Moses was humming that new melody he learned inside the Tent of Meeting. He was no longer tired. He looked out over the great sea of tents that housed the Twelve tribes of wandering Arameans and he smiled a Yahweh smile. "I wish all they all were prophets, Joshua. I wish they all really were."

But it would be a long time before the Holy Light would splash on all God's people again. Along time before leadership would no longer be just the province of Leaders.

It was only after Jesus came and then came back, appearing suddenly before his friends in a locked room on the evening after the greatest day since the world started spinning. He just stood there, with that silly old Yahweh smile and said, "Shalom." Then he puffed up his cheeks and blew the warm, sweet air of morning glories and lilacs on them and said, "Here's the Holy Spirit. You're the leaders now. Forgive the world, love the world, save the world." And then he was gone, but the faces of the Ten still shone with the Holy Light.

Fifty days later, in an upstairs room over the piazza above the marketplace, that Holy Light bounced right in. The shutters flew open and goosebumps popped out on the arms of the hundred and twenty people who had gathered to pray for peace. And a wondrous thing happened: the people started to tremble. Someone started clapping. Someone started singing in a low, soft moan. Someone started dancing. And before you could say "Hallelujah," the Holy Light was shining all over that upstairs room. The Hundred and Twenty started saying the most wondrous things. They looked above each others' head and there danced the Holy Light in little red and yellow flames.

They started talking and singing so loud that people in the marketplace below looked up to see what was going on. It sounded like the greatest party since the angels danced on the first day of the first week of the world. And down below, tourists from all over the Empire heard little snippets of their own languages echoing down the pavers' stones. They heard something about someone named Jesus and how he wasn't dead any more. They heard something about justice for the poor and redemption for the slaves.

Then Peter stuck his head outside, a little yellow and red flame dancing above him. "Good morning, folks. I guess you're wondering what's going on. Well, we're having a party, but we haven't been nipping at the Mogen David. We've been meeting the Lord himself up here.

"Remember how the prophet Joel foretold the last days? When he said that God would pour out the Spirit on everybody? And there would be blood and fire and smoke? Remember how he said the sun would be darkened and the moon would be a red as blood? Well, that wasn't about the end of the world, it was about the beginning of a new creation. It was about how everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be saved! It was about today, right now, right here, in Jerusalem!"

What are we supposed to make of these three world-ending stories? When the greatest prophet of the Hebrew people shared his authority with two kids who weren't even ordained? When the not-dead-any-more Jesus blew on his startled friends and told them to breathe in the Spirit of God so they could forgive the sins of the world? When the once-scared-of-his-own-shadow fisherman tapped danced around the room over the piazza?

It means this: the Spirit blows where it wills and there is nothing any human institution can do to stop it. It means that there are not three orders of ministry in the Church, there are four: the laity, bishops, priests and deacons. It means that you have the same authority that I do to proclaim the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' Name. It means that everyone who calls upon the Name of the Lord will be saved. It means living in the ecstatic presence of God. Ecstasy comes from the Greek "ek stasis," and it really means "out of the sameness, out of the ordinary."

God's people keep forgetting that Pentecost is not just a day, and not just a season: it is an age, an epoch. Moses, Joshua, Eldad and Medad got a little preview of how that would look. Joel's vision of the end of the world meant

that a New World would be born. It was a world where ordinary people, in Ordinary Time, would be given an extraordinary gift: the Holy Spirit of God. That Spirit would not be confined to some prescribed place in some prescribed way. The Spirit would blow, just like on the Day of Creation and wondrous things would happen. Out of the Ordinary would come the Extraordinary.

It is tempting to see the Church only in the light of Holy Orders. The early Christian theologian Ignatius wrote in the second century:

*You must all follow the lead of the bishop, as Jesus Christ followed that of the Father; follow the presbyters as you would the Apostles; reverence the deacons as you would God's commandment. Let no one do anything touching the Church, apart from the bishop. Let that celebration of the Eucharist be considered valid which is held under the bishop or anyone to whom he has committed it. Where the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as where Jesus Christ is, there is the Catholic Church.*

You can almost see General Joshua nodding in agreement.

But that's not the story of the Pentecostal Church. Now by that name, I don't mean just those denominations that sprung out of the Holiness movement at the turn of the last century. I mean the Church, founded when Jesus blew on ten scared disciples. The Church, spreading when twelve times ten disciples started speaking in languages they had never learned. I mean the Church, growing, vibrant and alive, right here at St. Martin's, in Forest Acres, South Carolina.

In this one little corner of the Tent of Meeting, you can feel the Spirit blowing. A dedicated group of Spirit-filled prophets is leading us through a time of searching for a new rector. Right here, in this little corner of the Tent of Meeting, a wondrous thing is happening. All over the place, young men are dreaming dreams, and old men are having visions. Young women and not as young are feeding the hungry, building houses for the homeless, caring for at-risk teens, and nourishing the little ones. We're building a school in Haiti and a medical clinic in Honduras. We're committed to doing our part to eliminate extreme poverty among God's people everywhere. There are straight people and gay people. There are black people and white people and brown people. There is an openness to what God has in store for

this place that will give you goosebumps if you'll only listen to the rushing of the wind.

St. Martin's is not dependent upon a rector, it is dependent upon the Spirit. No matter what may happen in the world around us, no matter which bishop may suddenly align with which Province, no matter who calls us heretics or who calls us crazy Holy Rollers, we can feel the Spirit blowing among us. We can see those little yellow and red tongues of fire over each others' heads.

It will make you tremble. Lord, it will make you clap. It will make you sing in a low, soft moan. It will make you dance for joy. And before you can say "Hallelujah," that Holy Light will be shining all over this place. Because all God's people here are prophets.

And that includes you.