

## Introduction for Pentecost Scripture Reading:

In 1926, a wealthy Toronto lawyer named Charles Vance Millar died, leaving behind him a will that amused and electrified the citizens of his Canadian province. Millar, a bachelor with a wicked sense of humor, stated clearly that he intended his last will and testament to be an “uncommon and capricious” document. Because he had no close heirs to inherit his fortune, he divided his money and properties in a way that amused him and aggravated his newly chosen heirs. Here are just a few examples of his strange bequests:

He left shares in the Ontario Jockey Club to two prominent men who were well known for their opposition to racetrack betting.

He bequeathed shares in the O’Keefe Brewery Company (a Catholic beer manufacturer) to every Protestant minister in Toronto.

But his most famous bequest was that he would leave the bulk of his fortune to the Toronto woman who gave birth to the most children in the ten years after his death.

This clause in his will caught the public imagination. The country was entering the Great Depression. As people struggled to meet even their

most basic economic responsibilities, the prospect of an enormous windfall was naturally quite alluring. Newspaper reporters scoured the public records to find likely contenders for what became known as The Great Stork Derby.

In 1936, four mothers, proud producers of nine children apiece in a ten year time span, divided up the Charles Millar's bequest, each receiving what was a staggering sum in those days of \$125,000. Charles Millar caused much mischief with his will. This was his final legacy to humanity.

However, when Christ left this earth, he bequeathed a different kind of legacy to his followers. He left his Holy Spirit - to comfort, to guide, and to empower. Today we celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit on the church.

Listen to the story of Pentecost:

**Acts 2:1-21** New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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

<sup>5</sup>Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. <sup>6</sup>And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. <sup>7</sup>Amazed and astonished, they asked, "Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?" <sup>8</sup>And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own

native language? <sup>9</sup>Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, <sup>10</sup>Phrygia (freegia) and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, <sup>11</sup>Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” <sup>12</sup>All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” <sup>13</sup>But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”

<sup>14</sup>But 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. <sup>15</sup>Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. <sup>16</sup>No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel:

<sup>17</sup>‘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.

<sup>18</sup>Even upon my slaves, both men and women,  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit;  
and they shall prophesy.

<sup>19</sup>And I will show portents in the heaven above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and smoky mist.

<sup>20</sup>The sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,  
before the coming of the Lord’s great and glorious day.

<sup>21</sup>Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.’

This is the Word of the Lord; thanks be to God

## Pentecost

Acts 2: 1-21

What in the world has been going on in Jerusalem since Easter? Have the Disciples been idly waiting around drinking wine? They've been there for 50 days; what have they been up to?

As noted in last Sunday's sermon, the first 40 days they spent being instructed about the Kingdom of God by the Risen Lord (1:3), and they spent a lot of time looking up as Christ ascend into heaven, and then an unspecified amount of time was spent forming a committee and reviewing candidates to electing Judas' replacement.

They have been busy learning how to survive without Jesus, but now it's a festival time in the city. It is time for Pentecost, the Jewish Festival of *Shovar* or the Festival of Weeks, a festival associated with the wheat harvest...a feast related to a time of Thanksgiving.

So, the family of Disciples, both nuclear and extended, are gathered together to do what they do best – eat! The turkey smells have been wafting through the house, and just as they are about to say grace over the dressing and green beans, all heck breaks loose!

Suddenly there is the sound of a great wind, humming, rumbling like a tornado....the mysterious and unpredictable wind that hovered over the waters at creation.

Then, there is something like St. Elmo's fire that dances over their heads ...the fire that burned a bush, but didn't consume it. Jesus' promised Comforter is upon them and the family's ideas about an orderly gathering are shattered forever. Everything is bursting apart, blown about, and broken open.

Uncle Matthew spills the gravy and Aunt Martha drops the turkey, and everyone heads for the street. The tourists who filled the Magnolia courtyard hear the commotion and come to find out what in heaven's name is going on. People who have never been to a church business meeting are suddenly in the middle of a doozy!

They burst out of the house into the streets of the city – a city teeming with everyone from everywhere. Luke is not just giving us a random list of nations but is letting the Disciples know up front that their mission is a universal one....even if they are slow in their understanding. They are communicating with everyone in the languages that they spoke. The

Disciples weren't linguists but each one spoke words that the visitors could understand. They had *Google Translator* and *Babbel* on their phones.

I'm always amused that the text records the comments made about the Disciples upon which the Spirit came on the day of Pentecost. Observers shook their heads and concluded that the worshipers had consumed too much wine too early in the day.

But actually, the work of the Holy Spirit always leaves some people shaking their heads, trying to explain by human action the activities of God.

A mixed-up, fragmented individual finds wholeness and healing. Folks shake their heads and mutter about psychology while others offer gratitude for the work of the Spirit. A church divided within its membership finally affirms a unity which preserves diversity. Some people speak of human compromise and others of spiritual compassion.

The Spirit of God breathes upon that family of Disciples a breath of hope and life. Pentecost is an assault on all the ways we separate ourselves from one another. Pentecost is an outward-moving process rather than an inward turning one, a broadening phenomenon rather than a contracting one. Like a tornado that blows through a house, the walls pull in, contract,

pulse, and then blow out. This great wind and fire changed things and the world has never been the same.

Whether the Disciples knew it or not, everyone was being invited to the party. We've got folks from Louisiana, South Dakota, Cameron, Mexico; we've got ministers, Wednesday night cooks, ushers, and teachers, Meals on Wheels volunteers, retirees, choir members, WWII, Korean, and Vietnam vets, Charter Members, Boomers, Xers, Millennials, Generation Y, teens, children, and babies. People who might have trouble communicating suddenly understand one another.

At this Pentecost celebration, Peter proclaims that God's church is a church where old and young, male and female, rich and poor, celebrate grace together. God breathes life into the church through a mighty rush of wind because nothing less would have gotten it started. The surge of the Spirit pushes the church out of safety into the neighborhoods, the work places, and the schoolrooms. The breath of God brings new worlds into being. The Church is born; frightened, confused people are empowered.

We try to control what we think, what we feel and what is going to happen next in the church. We don't leave much room for the Spirit. As an organization, we can do well financially, fill the building on Sunday, and get

along pretty well with one another without God's help; but, we can never be God's church on our own. The measure of a church is how open we are to the wind of God's Spirit. We must all listen for the message of *Ruach*, the wind/Spirit Breath of God.

During August when I was a child, I would lie on the grass (which was still green in NC) and watch the clouds. Of course I would identify shapes, but also I would watch the power of the wind on the clouds. Sometimes they moved swiftly, seeming to streak across the sky; other times, they seemed not to move at all.

I also listened to the wind blow through the trees, especially the pine trees. The sound was like a tune that shifted in pitch and tone as the days of August began to disappear. The wind's tune gave me a warning, "summer is almost over; it's almost time for school to start again....be ready, Libby, everything is changing; you are in a time of transition. As Becky said last week, we are at a time of transition as a church. Things are changing; I don't know how or when but change is a *comin*."

While I worked on the Pentecost text, I kept hearing in my head a song from West Side Story: ...The air is humming, and something great is coming! Who knows? It's only just out of reach, down the block, on a



beach. Who knows? Something's coming, I don't know what it is, but it is gonna be great!

Get ready Lake Shore the spirit is blowing through this place. Are you ready to be shaken up, blown about, and broken open?

Will it be great? Who knows? Could be? It's only just out of reach....