



Pentecost, Year C – May 23, 2010

Acts 2.1-21

A Homily preached by the Rev'd Canon M. Ansley Tucker

*Come, Holy Spirit, come.
Come as the wind, and refresh our weariness;
come as the fire to warm our hearts and purify our souls;
come and give speech to the Word within us;
that we may yearn with all our heart and soul, and mind and strength
to enter with joy into the fullness of the divine life,
through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Of all three persons of the holy and blessed Trinity, it is doubtless the Holy Spirit we find the most difficult to picture. The Spirit defies our instinct to quantify, to objectify, to visualize. Rather, we are left to "capture" the nature and work of the Spirit through the use of metaphor. Chief among these are wind, and fire, and speech. They are images worth exploring.

What about wind? When I think of the wind, I think of hot stuffy meeting rooms full of hot stuffy people, the air stagnant and heavy with the smell of bitter coffee, old perfume, and warm bodies. And the headache and lethargic lusting after an afternoon nap that come with the package. And so the wind, the wind is the breeze which blows through an open window, sweeping away what is old and stale, and renewing both the air, and me, in the process. It is so easy for Christians — indeed for whole churches, to become like meeting rooms: stale — set in our thinking, set in our habits, set in our ways of doing (not only in what we do, but how we do it). So that it all becomes rather boring, or at least, no longer invigorating. The ministry of the Spirit is to be for us what we mean when we say that someone is like "a breath of fresh air." The wind.

What about fire? Fire is something which the wind spreads. It means to us warmth, and light, and therefore our comfort and ability to survive. But fire can also be so warm that it is hot, so bright that it is blinding, and therefore that which purges and purifies us. The ministry of the Spirit is thus not only to comfort the afflicted, but to afflict the comfortable. Fire (indeed as wind, which does not *always* blow as a gentle breeze) is an ambiguous symbol. And we are wrong if we think that the Holy Spirit would not or does not move from time to time to shake us up a little. Fire.

What about speech? The gift of tongues given to the disciples on that first Christian Pentecost meant for them the ability to articulate, to give voice to the good news of salvation, to every human being. I suspect that many Christians have trouble even saying what their faith is. This is particularly true of Anglicans who, in this respect, have been likened to the Mackenzie River — frozen at the mouth twelve months a year. We find it hard to talk about our faith, and we are not yet very proficient at commending it across the boundaries of class, language, education, wealth and culture. But the ministry of the Spirit — and we have the Spirit within us, for heaven's sake! — is to assist us to do so, is to give us speech. If Jesus Christ is the Word of God, the Holy Spirit is he who enables us to *speak* the Word. Speech.

The human tendency has always been, no doubt will always be, to make sense of God by packaging him in images we understand. God, however, cannot and will not be contained by our preconceptions. And it is to our great good fortune that the Holy Spirit — precisely because we do not know how to visualise him — defies

our attempts to limit and delimit him. The Spirit is not wind. He is not fire. He is not speech. And yet he is wind, fire and speech.

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