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St. James', Mt. Airy
5/15/16

Pentecost C
Acts 2:1-21
Psalm 104:2-3,37
Romans 8:14-17
John 14:8-17

**Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;
take our hands and work through them;
take our hearts and set them on fire.
Amen.**

One of the things I've learned over the years is to pay attention when a word or image or theme comes up across multiple conversations or in different spheres of my life, often in what seem to be chance encounters.

I attribute this bubbling up to the Holy Spirit, and pay attention because more often than not, it is a sign of God at work: in my life, in our community, in the world.

Today on this fiftieth day after Easter – Pentecost – we celebrate the promised coming of the Holy Spirit.

This Spirit goes may many names: Sustainer. Advocate. Sanctifier. Comforter. Paraclete. Counselor. Guide. Indweller. Intercessor. Revealer. Witness. Wisdom. Life-giver.

And it has many images: the descending dove, flames, the wild goose, the wind, the breath of God, the love of God, and in today's reading from Acts: divided tongues, as of fire.

Today I want to focus on two – two that have been bubbling up recently and which I think we should pay attention to: the **wild goose** and a hybrid image flames and the love of God which create for us **hearts on fire**.

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As I wrote for the Thursday News email this week, Pentecost can be seen as both a **birthing** and a **broadening**.

Pentecost was a **birth-day**: a day shortly after Jesus' last resurrection appearance to his friends when the gift of the Holy Spirit came to all gathered together. "All" most likely meant the entire community, which by this point numbered about one hundred and twenty persons and included women and men – the Twelve and the many other unnamed, faithful followers of Jesus.¹

With the coming of the Holy Spirit this rag-tag group began to truly understand their vision and mission in a concrete way, birthing what would become a new religious path.

But Pentecost is also about **broadening** – the work of proclaiming *in Christ there is no East or West and the love of God is broader than the measures of our mind*.²

When the Spirit descended and the gift of many languages was given to the community, power was given to spread the message of the love of God to all. This message would spread as the disciples travelled, but it began in Jerusalem.

¹ Margaret P. Aymer, Exegetical Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2*.

² Richard L. Sheffield, Homiletical Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2*.

Those living there were immigrants, not pilgrims, and were subjects of Rome. As such, they all spoke Greek, the language of the roman military and of commerce for much of the early imperial period. But they were also multilingual, speaking languages of their natal lands also:³ Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia – and the list goes on and on.

As it was for those gathered in Jerusalem fifty days after Jesus’ death and resurrection, so it is for us: Pentecost is the answer to the question, “What should we do?” now that we know the love of God.

Here is where the Holy Spirit is like a **wild goose** – an image that comes of the Isle of Iona. Because geese are just as likely to waddle right up to you as they are to chase you and nip you on the behind.

You’ve heard me say more than once that part of what I heard when you called me as your Rector was a desire as a community to go deeper – deeper in your spiritual life and deeper in service to the wider community.

Yesterday at Diocesan Convention, Bishop Eugene Sutton, in his address, unveiled a new Vision and Mission for our diocese: Encounter Christ – Engage the World.

The full Vision statement is: **The Episcopal Diocese of Maryland is a community of love.**

³ Margaret P. Aymer, Exegetical Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2.*

The full Mission statement is: **The Mission of the Episcopal Diocese of Maryland is to encounter Christ everywhere and engage in God's mission of reconciliation in the world.**

As he spoke about how we are to **encounter** and **engage**, I realized that he was calling all of us into deeper personal and communal spirituality, and deeper connection and service at local and global levels.

For real, that wild goose snuck up behind me and got my attention with a loud honk – because the Spirit is blowing not just here in Mount Airy, but throughout our Diocese, and I believe with the Vision being set forth by our Presiding Bishop, Michael Curry – throughout our branch of the Jesus movement called The Episcopal Church.

The Spirit lit on those gathered in Jerusalem as divided tongues, as of fire – but I sense the Spirit in our midst here and now when our **hearts are set on fire**.

The work of **encountering** Christ and **engaging** the world is the continuing work of **birthing** and **broadening** that began with Pentecost. There is no one way to do the work, and in fact will be different in each gathered community as the gathered hearts are fired up in various ways.

As we slowly move into some of our own visioning work here at St. James', as we discern the new ways we are being called deeper in encountering and engaging, even as we work for more intentionality for those things we already do with great love, I can't wait to see how that wild goose surprises us and our hearts are set aflame.

Some of this work will be individual deepening – but all of it will be rooted in that word *community*. Because just as it was for those first followers known as The Way, it is just as true for us that we are created for community, and never fully live in God’s image until we live in communion.⁴

The Spirit’s fiery love creates community wherever it goes – we just have to pay attention to it bubbling up in our midst.

Jesus called for the Advocate to be with us forever – to abide with us and be in us. May we open our hearts and hands to this gift – on Pentecost, and always.

~ AMEN ~

⁴ Michael Jenkins, Pastoral Perspective, *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2*.