

Heads Up
[written in oral form]
Acts 2:1-21
Pentecost, Year A

Sunday, May 28, 2023
Gordon Allaby

I really like the concept of sanctuary:
A safe place to focus on worship; a non-secular place.
Sanctuary is where “other” happens with the community of believers.

Our sanctuary presents a very Mennonite décor style.
We are not extravagant with our symbolism; simplicity prevails.
The cross is often present and sometimes an open Bible.

What is very revealing is the absence of political and commercial symbols—no flag, thank goodness, and no commercials.

I still cannot get used to the hockey boards with ads on them. Now, they are computer generated. Impressive, yet distracting.

~~~~~

So, what do we do with this “special” place / this hopefully “safe” space?

It is not really a hide-out like the catacombs. We have windows and a sign out front stating who we are.

I wonder if non-followers of Christ know what we do here?  
I wonder if they think this is a special spiritual place where God connects with people in a special way? ???  
????

Likely that is not their assumption. Too bad.....

If they did think that, then they would be beating down our doors to get in.  
I keep reading and hearing that the vast majority of people are wanting something more spiritual in life; they want to feel and be connected to the divine spirit.

That interest explains the rise of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches.  
At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they virtually did not exist, but by the end of the century their numbers rivalled all the main-line protestant churches.

Needless to say, they do not have a corner on the Holy Spirit.  
The energized sensation they present is merely the focus of their quest and mission.

~~~~~

We Mennonites believe we are spiritual people, too.

While gathered in the sanctuary, we pray to sense God's presence. We invoke God's Spirit and we sing songs such as "Spirit of the living God fall fresh on me."

And, ... how has that been working out for us?

?????

Do we really want to be touched by God's Spirit?

Do we really want God to come to us,now?

Do we mean what we sing and speak?

~~~~~

In our culture, we do say a lot of things that we do not mean... or that are misleading.

There are countless examples of misleading phrases, such as "Heads Up."

When we hear "heads up" should we stretch our heads up?

I think "heads up" actually means "duck" and brace yourself.

~~~~~

Comedian George Carlin did an entire show on phrases that do not mean what we intend for them to mean.

For example: we are told to get "On" the plane, but he insisted that he would rather "get in the plane."

And, he noted, that a "near miss" with another plane is really a "near hit."

~~~~~

We use a lot of idioms.

Such as, "It is not about the money."

Or, "No, it is fine", which really means "I don't want to talk about it right now."

And another, "I may be wrong, but..." If you think you're wrong, then you would not speak out."

~~~~~

I fear we use idioms with God.

Do we really want to sense / experience/ receive God's Spirit?

???

~~~~~

2,000 years ago, a group about our size, around 120 were praying and waiting for God's Spirit to come in a special way.

This was not a pleasant experience.

They were confused, tormented with grief, and feeling abandoned.

Collectively, "Collectively" like a congregation they prayed and waited in expectation.

And then God's Spirit came to them.  
We call this occasion "Pentecost" because it was at the time of the Jewish holiday called "Pentecost."

The holiday was a celebration for the completion of the barley harvest.  
From all over the known world, the diaspora came to Jerusalem for the festival and for some "intense" partying.  
This was bigger than Passover, and that is telling.

The believers in Jesus were there, too; it was just the thing to do. I doubt they were partying.  
They were taking care of some internal business and were waiting.

Then suddenly...from the heavens, they were surprised.

This was an intense spiritual experience.

They described the "rush" as an enormous sound like a tornado.  
And the encounter felt like a fire burning every one of them.  
"Their Hearts were set on fire!" All were filled with God's Spirit.  
They were euphoric / ecstatic!

Nevertheless, more important than their ephemeral excitement was the fact that being filled with the Spirit led to service / to action and to reaching out and communicating with strangers.

They spoke with strangers and were understood.  
Proclaiming the Gospel commenced, as did the sharing and benevolence.

They preached and lived Christ, and thousands received and became God's love and grace, and then millions.

This all started with 120 living their faith and hope empowered by God's Spirit.  
~~~~~

Since that time, there have been numerous occasions when God's Spirit has moved in a unique way in the church.
They are often called "Spiritual Awakenings."

In the mid 1700's, Jonathan Edwards was part of one, as was Wesley a 100 years later.
In 1858 there was another, and thousands responded to the movement of the Spirit.

What is called the "Great Awakening" started in 1905.
It was noted that there was a "fervor of evangelism that affected every denomination."

More importantly, the following was reported:
There was a huge increase in community and charitable service;
People were more honest; old bills were paid;
Drunkenness decreased, and so did the jail population.
People put their faith in God, and it was manifested in uplifting and life-giving ways.

~~~~~  
These “Awakenings” should NOT be confused with “revivalism.”  
Revivalism is a human effort to conjure up a spiritual experience, and quite frequently,  
“Revivalism” becomes emotionally abusive, caustic and judgmental.  
*They are not exactly what I would call a good examples of “fruits of the Spirit.”*

~~~~~  
I recently watch the movie “Jesus Revolution.”
I remember **that** “Jesus movement” during the late 1960’s and early ‘70’s.
The movie was mostly accurate, except for two glaring errors.
One is that in the movie, no one smoked a cigarette.
The other was one of the main characters, Lonnie Frisbee, was gay, and there was no hint of that in the movie.

The theology was accurate, and I was not fond of it back then either.

I would not call the Jesus movement an awakening because it was mostly about the euphoria / the “high” of tapping into God’s Spirit.
That’s a better high than drugs, but it was not followed by a great deal of action.

~~~~~  
Receiving God’s Spirit usually includes a rush of joy.  
Yet, in my experiences, that was preceded with torment and discomfort which led to humility and surrender.

In old church language, that phase was called “Under conviction.”  
I will simply label it anguish.

~~~~~  
When God’s Spirit comes to us, we are given a purpose for action and service. The Spirit is not just to make us feel good.

Yes, there is relief and delight when we surrender and receive the Spirit.
But that is soon followed by a clarity of purpose and a resolve to follow God’s will.

~~~~~  
What would happen if we believed what we say and God responded?  
?????

We, our church, would not be the same.

Moreover, our community would be rattled to the core.  
There would be rejoicing and it would spread like a wild fire.

God's Spirit has that effect when received collectively.

I can only imagine what would happen.  
Perhaps, we would share the Good News with strangers?  
Perhaps, we would be given new ministries, and proclaim "Why not?" instead we cannot do that.

Perhaps, we would mend broken relationships and forgive our enemies—those who have abused us?

A Spiritual Awakening is wonderful,.... Yet I'm prone to think that we do not understand the potential / the power of God's Spirit moving a group of believers.  
I do not think we realize the potential.

~~~~~

It is like the story of the guy who walked into Home Hardware after a terrible windstorm.
He said to the salesperson, "I need a saw to cut up all the trees that were blown down on my property."

The salesperson responded, "I have just the saw for you. It is can easily cut up 100 trees in a day." He assured the man that it was their best saw.
The man said, "Then that's the saw for me. I'll take it."

However, the next day the man returned to the store in a furious mood, looking for the salesperson.
Finding him, he ranted, "I was only able to cut up 2 trees, yesterday. You guaranteed that it could do 100."

Perplexed, the salesperson took the saw from the man to check it out.
He pulled the choke, and then the cord, and revved the throttle to make sure it was properly working.

Surprised, the man yells out, "Wait, what's that noise?"

~~~~~

Do we really know the potential that is before us,...around us, and IN us?

Perhaps, we do have an inkling and it frightens us?  
????

Maybe we are afraid of change.... Or maybe what we really do not understand is the depth of God's love?

Perhaps, we wonder: if we **let go** of our plans / our control / our way....will God take care of us?

Does God love us that much?

If we let go will God sustain us?

~~~~~

In the late 1940's, my uncle went to a remote area in India as a missionary. After he learned the local dialect, he began to translate the Bible for them.

One day, he was looking for a word for "faith", and was having a difficult time coming up with the right word.

As he was searching for the proper word, a young boy from the village came into his study. He asked the boy to have a seat on a chair that was there, and said that he would be with him shortly.

He looked up to see the boy walking around the chair, looking at it, but not sitting on it.

My uncle repeated, "Have a seat and I'll be with you in a moment."

The boy continued just looking at the chair and touching it.

My uncle then realized that this boy had never ever sat on a chair, and so was very apprehensive.

The boy then asked in his native language, and used a word, just one word, that implied, "Can I give myself to this and know it will hold me up?"

That was the word my uncle used for "faith."

Can I give myself to this and know it will hold me up?

~~~~~

That phrase is the **anguish**, and the YES response is inviting God's Spirit to come.

~~~~~

No doubt, we all have been touched by God's Spirit, but what if the Spirit comes to US, all 120 of us?

Pentecost teaches us that these "special" Spiritual movements are done IN and through the community of believers...for a reason. And, they are not for personal gratification.

What if God's Spirit comes to us?

~~~~~

A few years ago, the author, Annie Dillard said the following:  
“Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke? Or, as I suspect does no one believe a word of it?”

She continued, “The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning.  
[It is madness to dress up] for church when we should be wearing crash helmets.  
Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares;  
They should lash us to our pews,... for the sleeping God may wake some day and take offence.... OR  
...the waking God may draw us out to where we can never return.”

~~~~~

A potent perspective, yet pretty accurate...because God could come to us like the rush of a tornado and set our hearts on fire.

I am not a prophet, but I know enough to say, “Heads UP it could happen.”

And, maybe Heads Up really means Heads down in prayer.

~~~~~

Keep in mind, we cannot conjure up the Spirit.  
We do not control God’s Spirit.  
We invite and we wait.

Dare we sing the response hymn with sincerity and hope?