

“Earth, Wind, and Fire”

Rev. Ken McGarry at The First Church in Stoneham, Massachusetts

May 28, 2023 - Pentecost Sunday

[John 20:19-23; Acts 2:1-21](#)

Earth, Wind, and Fire are the subjects of our scripture lessons and sermon on this Pentecost Sunday. And no, I'm not talking about the R&B group, whose soulful and funky sounds have been gracing our ears for the last 50 years (although that would be fun). Rather, we are celebrating today with Christians of all kinds all around the globe that the earth -- especially we the creatures of it -- have been blessed with the holy Wind and divine Fire of God coming upon us.

We heard in today's readings, two very different accounts of the outpouring of God's Spirit upon the earth's people. In our first lesson from the gospel of John, the disciples received the Spirit, meaning Wind or Breath, when the resurrected Christ appeared to them and then breathed on them, empowering them to carry out their mission to go out and continue Jesus' work of breathing words of forgiveness and life upon others.

According to our second lesson from the Book of Acts, which is actually part two of the gospel of Luke and tells the story of how the good news of God's saving action in the world did not end with the death, resurrection, and departure of Jesus, but continued through the work and witness of Jesus' disciples, we read about how God's Spirit came to the disciples of Jesus as they gathered some 50 days after the events of the Holy Week during the Jewish festival of Pentecost. It was common at the time for Jewish people to travel from where they lived to Jerusalem to celebrate certain festivals such as the harvest festival of Pentecost, and so in Jerusalem for that year's festival were people who had come from nearby places as well as from distant lands. From a variety of regions of the Roman Empire, pilgrims had streamed into Jerusalem for the celebration. And so when God's Mighty, Holy Wind came upon Jesus' disciples, appearing as tongues of fire that came upon each of them, enabling them to breathe out the story of "God's deeds of power" in the diverse tongues of the various people of the earth who had gathered in Jerusalem, all those who heard the life-giving message of God given to them in their own languages were blessed.

Today, on this Pentecost, we celebrate that God's Wind did not come only to the first disciples and to those who received their message, but that the Spirit of God has been breathed upon us as well. We modern creatures, though our bodies are formed from the dust of the earth and we shall all surely, someday, return the stuff of our bodies to the earth, are more than just a collection of the earth's materials. For we are earth creatures who are filled with the Breath of God, who are animated and moved by that Holy Wind, and specially empowered by God, filled with God's Fire, to do God's work of blessing other earth creatures and the planetary home we share.

Like the first disciples and pilgrims to Jerusalem we read about in Acts, we gather today as people of all kinds. The earth's dust has gathered to form each of us uniquely, and so we are diverse. The types of bodies we have are diverse, the ages and abilities of our bodies are diverse, our backgrounds are diverse, how we communicate is diverse, how we are wired sexually is diverse, our understandings of our own gender and how we wish to be understood are diverse, our traditions are diverse, our political leanings are diverse, and our desires for ourselves and the world around us are diverse. We gather here just as we are, and the good news we celebrate is that God not only gathers us together as this diverse family, but that God gathers with us and in us this day just as we are. Because the same Wind of God blows across us all, the same Breath of God fills us all, and the same Fire of God burns within us all, though we are diverse, we are one.

United by God and empowered by God, we are all called by God and sent by God, just as the first disciples were when the Spirit came upon them at Pentecost, to continue Christ's work; God still takes earthly flesh in this one, living, diverse Body of Christ, and God is still at work in the world through us.

So how will we let God work through us here today as a family of faith? What new creative and re-creating work will God do through us? How will God speak anew words of sin-forgiving life through us to people of all kinds?

And each of us should reflect on this Pentecost Sunday upon our unique roles within this united Body of Christ. How will you let the unboxed and unboxable Wind of God set you free from whatever constrains you? How will you let God breathe words through you that give life to others? What will you do with the power God gives you to continue God's work of bridging divides between people?

This Pentecost, and every day beyond today, may each of us echo the prayer of William Sloane Coffin, who was pastor of the Riverside Church in Manhattan, that I often offer prior to beginning sermons: “O God, take our minds and think through them, take our lips and speak through them, and take our hearts and set them on fire. Amen.”