

**John 20:19-23**  
**St. Andrew's, Nogales**

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“Suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.”

Violent wind, tongues of fire. How powerfully this imagery resonates on this Day of Celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit. No sweet images of doves! No gentle breezes. No campfire flames contained in a circle of rocks. Oh, no! Not this Pentecost.

This Pentecost we get violent wind and tongues of fire.

We here in the US have been living with violent winds and tongues of fire for weeks and weeks. Violent winds of the most destructive tornado in recorded history in this country took out the whole center of Joplin, Missouri, bringing incredible destruction and even death. There have been hundreds of tornados through the Midwest and South.

Tongues of fire creeping up the mountains just west of Rio Rico and Tubac, coming so near to the homes of many members of this parish that they prepared to evacuate on short notice. The Murphy fire has burned over 68,000 acres and is now 90% contained. And the largest fire ever in Arizona, the Wallow fire near the New Mexico border, has already burned over 408,000 acres and is only 6% contained. Smoke from that fire has already traveled as far away as Canada.

Oh, no, we will not forget the imagery of Pentecost this year.

Wind and fire can be oh, so destructive.

Combine wind and fire together and a terrible power is unleashed.

And yet wind and fire can bring new life. After they sweep through a forest or a grassland, new growth begins again.

The wind, the Spirit, the breath of God is present at creation itself.

And fire points to the presence of the divine. Remember the burning bush?

The Christian church begins to form on that day of wind and fire in Jerusalem some 2000 years ago. The spirit enters the room with a roar, it attracts attention and a crowd gathers outside. The crowds of people from many countries, gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Weeks, are amazed and astonished because they hear and understand the disciples, who are Galileans, speaking in their various languages about God's deeds of power.

Peter is inspired to preach quite a long sermon, it seems, which is not included in our reading today. And at the end of his sermon the people in the crowd ask the disciples, “Brothers, what should we do.” And Peter says to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.”

And we are told that those who welcomed the message were baptized, some 3000 people!

The gifts of the spirit are unleashed that day and are spread by the apostles to distant lands and peoples, and the world is changed. Cultural barriers break down; women find new roles in the church, and people share their gifts and wealth. And the Spirit is so strong that the word of Jesus Christ reaches all the way from Jerusalem to the British Isles by the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

The Spirit has spread clear around the world and down through the centuries and is with us today.

The Spirit is loose in the church, and has always been so, at times showing itself strongly, at other times much more quietly. Sometimes the church hierarchy has suppressed it. But it is always present. In times of transition, which bring both promise and hope, but also fear and mourning, we can call upon the spirit to share God’s creative and life-giving power among us. May we find our voices and creative powers, gifts and skills strengthened in such times of adversity.

Here at St. Andrew’s we have faced much adversity in the last year, starting at the end of last summer, from termites in the summer, to electricity being cut off during the fall and winter, to the freezing and bursting of our furnace pipes requiring replacement of our heating system. We continue to face challenges for long-term repair of this building.

This spring we have had other types of challenges. But let us always remember that we have been given many gifts of the Spirit, as Paul reminds the members of the church in Corinth.

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good,” Paul reminds the members of the church in Corinth. And he names many of the gifts: wisdom, knowledge, faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, the discernment of spirits, tongues and the interpretation of tongues.

Yes, we have been given individual gifts, Paul reminds us, but let us not forget that he also reminds us that our gifts are to be used for the common good, the common good of all. “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body...and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

My prayer for all of us on this Pentecost day of violent wind and tongues of fire is “May God’s Holy Spirit lead us, guide us and inspire us in these coming days.”

Amen.