

# Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections based on this week's lectionary readings

May 24, 2015

Day of Pentecost, Year B

## The readings this week:

- Acts 2:1-21 ◦ Psalm 104:24-34, 35b
- Romans 8:22-27 ◦ John 15:26-27;16:4b-15

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

## Pentecost Change

Because Pentecost celebrates the coming of the Holy Spirit, we usually offer special prayers that the Holy Spirit will fall afresh on us. But do you think we really mean it? I'm not so sure.

Read the passages appointed for this day again. Notice that while each of them talks about the Holy Spirit in a distinct way, they are all in harmony on one point: when the Holy Spirit comes, things change. Acts might be the easy one as -- goodness gracious -- any previous notions of the Gospel being limited to the Jerusalem disciples are exploded or, maybe better given the imagery of the story, are incinerated. Acts scholars will want me to be clear that all those involved are Jews from the Diaspora returning to Jerusalem to worship and not yet Gentiles. Fine - duly noted. Nevertheless, I think Luke's theological drift is clear: this thing is way, way bigger than the disciples thought. (And this, of course, is just the beginning....)

In the Romans passage the Spirit indeed comes to help, but it is to help us name those needs and desires to deep for words. The whole world -- including those of us with the Spirit, Paul makes clear -- groans with anticipation and struggle as we wait. The Spirit helps us name these pangs, but doesn't alleviate them. Similarly in John, Jesus talks about the coming of the Advocate (whom we also call the Comforter), but the Spirit comes to testify that we might testify, often to a hostile world.

In each case, the Spirit's presence is as at least as disruptive as it is comforting. Why? Because resurrection isn't more of the same, it's life from death.

So I'll ask again: Is this really what we want? I mean, while I've never heard anyone actually pray,

"Come Holy Spirit that we might remain exactly as we are," that's often how we act. For whatever we may mouth on Pentecost, most of the time we resist meaningful change in favor of "the way things have always been done."

The thing is, there is no "the way things have always been done," only "the way we've done them in recent memory" -- which of course really means "the way I've gotten used to them being done."

I understand this focus on tradition -- it's not just a matter of comfort or personal taste. It's also a matter of confidence. Lots of the things we do -- our church practices, if you will -- we do, quite frankly, because they've worked. And so we trust them. But my hunch -- actually, it's strong than that -- my conviction is that the population for whom our tried-and-true practices are working is only getting smaller, while the population and generation for whom they are not working is only getting larger.

Which means that it's time to start innovating, and wondering, and exploring, and experimenting and in all these ways try to figure out together what works in this day and age...for those who are coming, for those who haven't been coming lately, and for those who have never come.

Which means, I think, that we could use a heavy dose of Holy Spirit to grant us both the creativity and the courage to enter into this spirit of invention and experimentation. And, believe me, it takes both. We need creativity to help us think outside the box and courage to not give in either to our insecurities or to the insistence of others that we can't change because "we've always done it this way..."

...This change stuff is hard. It makes us nervous. But the Holy Spirit we celebrate on Pentecost has a way of not only shaking things up but also granting the courage and confidence to see things through. For this reason we should pray, perhaps now more than ever, "Come, Holy Spirit!"

An excerpt from [Dear Working Preacher](#), David Lose



# Reflecting on the Word



## 1st Reading: Acts 2:1-21

How do the Jews respond to the power of the Spirit which they witness? Here we see Peter as a dynamic leader and preacher. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that has changed this man who was once a coward who denied Jesus three times. Scripture, again, is the foundation of Peter's proclamation of truth. What message does the Old Testament book of Joel have for the bewildered crowd? Imagine you were there on the day of Pentecost. What do you think it would have been like for you as one of the crowd looking on? How has your life been affected by the gift of the Holy Spirit? How does the life and purpose of your church or Christian fellowship group compare to that of this group? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

## Psalm Reading: Psalm 104:24-34, 35b

When have you felt that God's creation helped you to know him? How do these verses express an orderliness to what God has made? How do these verses show that God not only created but also personally takes care of what he has made? What responses to God are triggered by the psalmist's meditation on creation? When have you enjoyed some aspect of the natural rhythms described here? As you meditate on what God has made, how would you like to respond to God? [Quiet Time Bible Study, InterVarsity Press](#)

Dear faithful ones, our church requires a facility with language that goes far beyond Greek, Hebrew, or any modern second language. We must be fluent in the languages of faith and love as well.

Don't let Pentecost just be another date on the liturgical calendar, a festival day where red clothing, paraments, and flowers are the big deal. The Spirit is present and accounted for, so let that mighty wind wash over you and all God's people. Let the Spirit whisper in your ear in the language you most need to hear, and trust that same Spirit to give you the words you need to speak to those assembled. May you be awakened to the divine will for community in which you serve and live. My prayer for you is the gift of fresh, bold faithful words spoken in love and carried on the wind of that wonderful advocate and Spirit of God.

From *Love Spoken Here* by Sharron R. Blezzerd: Read the complete article at [Stewardship of Life](#)

Pentecost, Glenda Dietrich Moore



## 3rd Reading: Romans 8:22-27

What does this passage have to say regarding personal as well as world-wide suffering and brokenness? What should be our attitude when facing these? How does the picture of the "Spirit himself [interceding] for us with groans that words cannot express" give hope and courage? What are some reasons that we may feel like God's love is distant? [Koinonia](#)

## 4th Reading: John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Think about your understanding of the Holy Spirit. How do you see the Spirit as a Helper in your life? The Spirit convicts the world of sin and judgement; why you believe this? Why does Jesus say the disciple could not bear all that he could say about the Spirit? How does the Spirit tell us what God is thinking? How does the Spirit guide us into the truth about Jesus? What comfort do you take knowing that Jesus gives us the Spirit so we never are alone? Is anything holding you back from experiencing the Spirit's power in your life? [Gawler Uniting Church](#)

## Praying Toward Sunday

O Lord, on that first Pentecost you breathed new life into your disciples and changed them from listless and disillusioned men and women into enthusiastic, excited, and exuberant witnesses to your power. May your Spirit so fill us too, that we may also take on a new dedication and devotion to the work of your kingdom, through the same Holy Spirit. Amen.

H. Burnham Kirkland, [The Spirit Brings Life](#)