

When I was sixteen years old, I was blessed to travel to Mexico with Voices of Youth: a youth choir from the Virginia Conference UMC who was there to build relationships and do mission work. We started our time in Mexico by attending the meeting of the Mexico Annual Conference. It was there that I experienced something I will never forget.

If you know me, you may have realized that I am a type A person. I like plans. I like to be organized. I like to-do lists and making systems and structures that are effective. While on I was on this trip all those things were challenged. Our schedule changed daily, we stayed with host families who didn't speak our own language, we were in an unfamiliar land. We were not even allowed to drink the water. Needless to say, I was out of my comfort zone.

Although I knew some Spanish, I was by no means fluent. I was excited about attending this Annual Conference meeting, I mean we Methodists are known for our methods, surely, I would experience something familiar that connected me with these new brothers and sisters in Christ. Maybe we would even sing a familiar hymn.

The leader of the Annual Conference invited the congregation into a time of prayer. “Yes!” I thought. “I can do this!” I thought he would be the only one praying and we would bow our heads and quietly pray along with him, but then something amazing happened.

After he invited the community to pray with him everyone started praying at the same time, passionately, loudly to God. They dropped to their knees on the floor and prayed with reckless abandon. Truth be told, this made my type-A-self uncomfortable, and yet I found myself being swept up by the power of the Holy Spirit. I dropped to my knees along with my other friends on the trip and we all prayed to God, loudly, in our own language. It was powerful because there were 500 people praying to God in different languages.

This memory will forever be ingrained in my mind, and every Pentecost Sunday I celebrate this moment, because for me it was the first time I felt the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. It was something I will never forget.

Today we give thanks to God for the gift of the Holy Spirit and Pentecost Sunday. We have been preparing for this day for the past 50 days of season of Easter.

As we celebrated the risen and ascended Lord, we knew this was not the end of our story. We knew that God was not done with us yet, God was still moving in our lives. God was still up to something.

Jesus had promised the disciples in John 14 that they would not be left alone. In John 14:15-20 Jesus said: “If you love me, you will obey my commandments. I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper who will be with you forever. That helper is the Spirit of Truth. The world cannot accept him, because it doesn’t see or know him. You know him, because he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you all alone. I will come back to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. You will live because I live. On that day you will know that I am in my Father and that you are in me and that I am in you.”

The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is how we remain connected to God. In fact, it is the Holy Spirit who guides us to salvation. The Holy Spirit woos us until we are aware of God’s gift of grace. The Holy Spirit empowers us as we are justified in our faith and profess our faith in Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit sustains us as we live out our discipleship.

So, we take one Sunday a year to celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, and that God is still moving through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in the world today.

In Acts 2 we recount the violent coming of the Holy Spirit. You see the Holy Spirit did not come in a subtle fashion. The Spirit came like a rushing wind and tongues of fire.

Just as we talked about last week, we remember that on the day of Pentecost, God through the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, made it possible for all who were there to understand in one language the good news of Jesus Christ. One commentator put it this way: In the moment of Pentecost, “the tower of Babel was reversed. Sin destroyed communication; the Holy Spirit restored communication.”ⁱ

Pentecost was an important marker in the history of Christianity. Last week we talked about the disciples who were waiting on the Holy Spirit. They had seen the ascension of Christ and were instructed to wait, so that’s what they were doing. They spent time in the temple in prayer and were gathered together in community.

In this waiting there was no forward movement of the Gospel, but in the moment of Pentecost the Christian church was anointed with the Holy Spirit and tasked to go out and be witnesses of the gospel of good news so all might know the grace of God.

Just as other huge moments in Scripture we see that the timing of this event is important. Just as Christ instituted the last Supper during the Jewish Passover celebration to signify his role as the paschal lamb and promised Messiah, we see that God chose another Jewish Feast Day to show God’s identity.

This feast day was called “The Festival of Harvest” and was instituted in Exodus 23:16. On this day, the Jews would make a yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem to celebrate this important Holy Day in the life of the Church. God knew this. God wanted a big audience. God wanted to anoint as many people as possible into the good news of Christ so the biggest impact could be made.

John Piper put it this way: The day of Pentecost being on the same day as the Feast of the Harvest showed “beautiful symbolic significance: the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in extraordinary power was meant for witness and world evangelization. And what is this but a great harvest in the field of the world. And that is exactly what happened—3,000 people were harvested for God and given eternal life on the day of Pentecost, the feast of harvest.”

These words sound familiar. We know that Jesus called us to this important work. In Matthew 9:37-38 Jesus said, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.”

God is still calling us to be workers of the harvest and to be swept up by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus Christ gave his life for us on the cross, he became the great equalizer, now through faith in Jesus Christ, all people were invited into this covenant with God. The Holy Spirit is our God-translator. The Holy Spirit is the one who interprets to us God’s calling and will upon our life. On the day of Pentecost each person there was able to hear in their own language and understand the telling of God’s mighty deeds through Jesus Christ. And if they doubted this miracle, how could they account for the tongues of fire resting on top of each person?

In the Old Testament we remember the account of Moses leading the Israelites through the wilderness following God who was a pillar of cloud by day and a fire at night.ⁱⁱ Through the symbol of God’s fire, we see God is with us leading us. Just as the mantle was for the prophets, the fire is what propelled God’s people forward to do the work of the Lord.

The good news for our lives today is that we too are being called to be swept up in the power of the Holy Spirit for the harvest for God.

The good news is that we do not have to do this holy work on our own volition.

Through this anointing from God the gospel message spread all over the world. The Holy Spirit is still moving in our lives today.

So, what is stopping you from being swept up by the Spirit? Perhaps you are a type A like me and don’t want feel out of control. Maybe it is pride...you don’t want to fully surrender. Maybe it is fear.

Whatever it is that it stopping you from being swept up in the amazing power of the Holy Spirit, today I invite you to get out of your own way to see God is moving in your life.

I will never forget another Holy Spirit moment that I experienced at Culpeper UMC. We started covenant groups one year and at the very first meeting I asked group members what faith goals they had. We went around the circle and when we stopped on a lady, I will call Mary, she said, “I am embarrassed to share the I have never experienced the Holy Spirit. I would really like to know what that feels like.” In this holy moment of vulnerability Mary said something that really resounded with other members of the group who were too afraid or embarrassed to admit that they felt the same way. So, we decided as a group to work on Holy Spirit sightings.

Each week we would start our group time sharing about ways we thought God was moving in our own lives. So many beautiful and heartbreaking stories were shared as group members began to trust each other and become more vulnerable in their sharing. At our last group meeting Mary said something beautiful. I will never forget it. She said, “I remember at our first group meeting where my goal was to experience the Holy Spirit. Through sharing my own stories about God moving in my life and hearing your stories I realized that it wasn’t that I wasn’t experiencing the movement of God, I just didn’t have words to identity that as the work of the Holy Spirit.”

Like Mary, I think many of us have these moments where we see God is at work. This could be in our own lives through the people God places in our lives or in the lives that we are gifted to journey alongside.

God is always working through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, but are we able to name these God sightings as such?

I see the Holy Spirit working at Flint Hill United Methodist Church through people passionate about studying the word of God.

I see the Holy Spirit working at Willis Chapel United Methodist Church through the way we take care of each other.

I see the Holy Spirit working at Sperryville United Methodist Church through the way that we have become a family of God.

The Holy Spirit is always moving in our lives, urging us, or even begging us to continue to share this same message that the people experienced on Pentecost Sunday. The Holy Spirit is our God conscious and our greatest tool for discernment.

On this the birthday of the church, we celebrate the movement of the Holy Spirit and how God continues to propel us forward into the harvest. May we be open to the Spirit’s movement and guidance in our lives and may we too be swept up in the Holy Spirit. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Endnotes

ⁱ Disciple 1 Bible Study Fast Track. Student Manual. Abingdon Press: Nashville, TN. P. 42.

ⁱⁱ Exodus 13:21-22

Additional Resource

The New Interpreter’s Biblical Commentary. Vol. X. Abingdon Press. Nashville, TN. 1995.