

Sunday's Sermon

Gloria Dei Lutheran Church

250 Fox Hill Road ■ Hampton, Virginia 23669

May 19, 2024

The Reverend David E. Fox

Pentecost (Year B) 2024

Acts 2:1-21; John 15:26-27; 16:4b-15

Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

The day before Thanksgiving is the busiest day for any grocery store. They can make more in that one day than what they make in an average week. Of course, on days like the day before Thanksgiving, we always had a larger crew of people working. I worked at a grocery store through high school and college. I remember that oftentimes we would have the “calm before the storm” as if everyone were sitting at home calling one another on what time they should all come to the store. Things would be so slow that we would talk about sending folks home and WHAM, like a mighty rushing wind, here came the pre-Thanksgiving rush. The aisles were crammed. The shelves were in disarray. The cashiers couldn't scan fast enough. The baggers got lost in the sea of buggies in the parking lot. Folks wanted to come in, get their things, and leave. They could not tolerate waiting. The rush lasted a few hours. We all did a week's worth of work in a matter of three to four hours. It was as if we didn't know what had just hit us. We were all exhausted, but we felt good about what had been accomplished. That rush of people drastically changed our day.

Pentecost was a festival of the harvest celebrated fifty days after Passover, and it is also commonly known as the Feast of Weeks. During this celebration, folks gathered to give thanks to God for the first fruits of that year's harvest. Charles Talbert says that the day encompasses the covenant between God and God's people that was cut at Mt. Sinai, when the law was given to Moses and God's people.ⁱ As years went on, the celebration was less and less about the harvest and more and more about the covenant. Today, our celebration of Pentecost, as Christians, takes place fifty days after Easter, rather than Passover, and our celebration is not about giving thanks for the first fruits of the harvest but is instead about giving thanks for the first fruits of the Holy Spirit.ⁱⁱ

Our focus shifts from the gospel to the book of Acts where the story of the Day of Pentecost is detailed. Jesus has been lifted up into heaven; the ascension has already happened. And the apostles are waiting on a promise that Jesus made about the sending of the Holy Spirit, the advocate, the Spirit of Truth. They weren't sure about what all this promise of the Holy Spirit entailed, like going to work at the grocery store on the day before Thanksgiving for the first time. The apostles were all gathered with great anticipation in one place, the upper room, gathered together like all the cashiers and baggers gather to the front when the words “rally to the front” come over the intercom. And WHAM, suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Fire, like that that comes from a candle, rested over each of the apostles. The Holy Spirit blew in and filled each of them up. The Holy Spirit gave them the ability to speak in other languages. The rush of the Holy Spirit rushed in and began to use the apostles to complete the Holy Spirit's work. It was as if they didn't know what had hit them. That rush of the Holy Spirit changed the apostles' day, as well as their and the world's lives.

No one, that I can think of, likes to be rushed. In fact, if you want to make someone angry, just tell them in any roundabout way to “hurry up,” or load them down with so much work to do that they have no choice but to work way longer than what they intended to work.

For folks who do not like the rush, we sure do find out ways to always remain in a rush. We are so busy that we cannot help but continually be in a rush. It's almost as if we work against ourselves in trying to alleviate our rushed lives; it's as if we are in a rush to get rid of the rush. And so when we hear this Holy Spirit that comes on the scene in a rush, we often think of our already busy lives; and we may just think to ourselves, "It would be just fine if that Holy Spirit blew right over top of me and found someone else."

Maybe, just maybe, we don't want to be filled with this Holy Spirit that comes in like the sound of a violent rushing wind. We may not want to face the change that the Holy Spirit brings into our lives.

Just like the pre-Thanksgiving rush put us to work at the grocery store and just like the Holy Spirit put the apostles to work with speaking in different languages, so too the Holy Spirit is putting us to work.

We may think we cannot take on one more task to add to our rushed lives. However, first and foremost you are a Child of God and everything else falls into place from there, not vice versa. Leave the rushing up to the Holy Spirit and then be open to the tasks that the Holy Spirit works through you.

With the Holy Spirit at work in and through us, our lives are and will be forever changed. Things may even seem like they are in disarray according to the world's standards.

The Holy Spirit is putting us to work by making us witnesses of what Jesus has done and is doing in our lives. The Holy Spirit is putting us to work by helping out our neighbors in need. The Holy Spirit is putting us to work by welcoming the newcomer into town. The Holy Spirit is putting us to work by taking care of God's beautiful creation. The Holy Spirit is putting us to work to feed the world. The Holy Spirit is putting us to work to spread the love of Jesus Christ to all that we meet. The Holy Spirit is putting us to work by having us pray for one another. And as the Holy Spirit is putting us to work, the broken system in which we live is telling us that this is all wrong and that we do not have the time to fool with such trivial things.

When the Holy Spirit shows up, the world says "What does this mean?" And while pondering and trying to disprove the Holy Spirit's work, the Holy Spirit is at work turning the world upside down changing damnation into salvation.

This idea of a rush may have us thinking in terms of despair, but as Nancy Claire Pittman writes, "[The author of Acts] is concerned to show that the end of time as God has created it has actually begun in the events of Pentecost and that the awareness of this coming of God's end time should not produce despair, but precisely the opposite, hope. A hope that propels the Christian community forward into a mission of witness and proclamation.ⁱⁱⁱ"

Brothers and sisters, as Children of God, we are called to share in this Kingdom work. Let the Holy Spirit rush on in and use us to bring about salvation from God. This Kingdom work that the Holy Spirit has us doing is life changing not only for us, but also for the world. Rush on in and blow, Holy Spirit, blow.

ⁱ Pittman, Nancy Claire. NewProclamation.com. Commentary on Day of Pentecost. 06/03/2014.

ⁱⁱ Jacobson, Diane. NewProclamation.com. Commentary on Day of Pentecost. 06/03/2014.

ⁱⁱⁱ Pittman, Nancy Claire. NewProclamation.com. Commentary on Day of Pentecost. 06/03/2014.