

Have you ever had the embarrassing circumstance of someone gifting you a present, only when you unwrap it, you have no clue what it is or how to use it? Stumbling for what to say, you profusely thank them for “having known you really needed a Tire Gauge,” when they reply “But it is a Meat thermometer?” When we went to our first church, there was a couple, who gave us this atrocious, gaudy lamp, covered in sea shells and wind chimes, with shards of mirror, the thing reflected lights on the ceiling like a Disco Ball. Come to discover, this had been their family joke of passing this lamp to unsuspecting loved ones, who were only able to get rid of it, by adding something to the whole and giving it to the next unsuspecting generation. I so wished we had had a Patio Sale! That is, what the gift of the Holy Spirit feels like, in the contemporary church. We have been taught the traditions for worshipping GOD, following GOD’s LAW of Torah. We know Jesus personally, his parables, sermons and human life. But the church has always struggled with what to do and how to respond to the unpredictable Holy Spirit.

There are days when we know exactly what to expect and do. Throughout Advent we light Candles. We are uncertain whether the Peace candle comes before the Joy candle, but we light candles. Palm Sunday we wave palms. Easter we knew Jesus will be resurrected, because he said he would. Christianity has been scripted out for over 2000 years, and Judaism for thousands of years even Empires before that. HOWEVER, PENTECOST is different. Pentecost is the Day the Holy Spirit came to town. We do not often talk about the Holy Spirit, as if the Holy Spirit were the unwelcome relative, the Ghost of something occult.

Actually, the Holy Spirit is described, over and over again in the Bible, not just on the Day of Pentecost.

When Elijah sought the Cave where Moses witnessed where God had gone. Moses saw Wind and Fire and flood, but God was not in those. Then a still, small voice spoke “What are you doing here Elijah?”

“When Moses was keeping the flocks of his Father-in-law Jethro, he led the flock to the far side of the desert, to Horeb, the Mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it was not consumed by the fire.”

“In the Beginning when God created the heavens and the earth; and the earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; The Spirit of God brooded over the face of the waters.”

That is our understanding of the Holy Spirit. God creates out of Nothingness, before there is time and place, *ex nihilo*. But the Holy Spirit causes ripples over the face of Chaos, the Wind blows over the depths of the deep, calling Life/Change into being.

A vitally important part of the meaning of Pentecost is the CONTEXT GIVEN that devout Jewish believers thought they did know what they were to do on the Day of Pentecost. Pentecost had been a Holiday in Judaism. There is a Festival called Shavuot, in English the Festival of Weeks, when you tie a silken thread around the first / best blossoms of the garden, that even while the fruit or grain is still a flower, it is dedicated to become an offering of first fruits to God. In the midst of this Spring Festival they celebrated the 50th Day after Passover; 50 days after Pentecost. Recall that Passover was the final 10th Plague demonstrating god’s power over Pharaoh. Passover was every family, or cluster of neighbors, sacrificing a lamb and as part of the meal marking the doorposts of the house that the Believers here sacrificed a lamb. As the Spirit of Death PASSED OVER, the first-born died in any house where there had been no sacrifice to God. They crossed over the Red Sea into the Wilderness. BUT on the 50th Day, God gave to Moses the 10 Commandments of Torah. The gift of PENTECOST was not simply the gift of Stone Tablets, not simply Civil Criminal and Religious Laws, the Gift of Pentecost was a Covenant Promise from God of trust and relationship, I will remember you.

Which then are we celebrating, the Gift of Law or Spirit, or what? Have you ever known someone who was born on a Holiday? They often feel cheated to not have Birthday presents because they received Christmas presents. I knew one woman who changed the date of her birthday to six months later.

“Why of all days does the Holy Spirit come on Pentecost?”

For Judaism, the gift of TORAH gave ISRAEL identity and purpose and meaning. YOU ARE THE PEOPLE GOD GAVE THE 10 COMMANDMENTS. GOD AFFIRMED RELATIONSHIP, I WILL NEVER LEAVE YOU!

In her book ON DEATH & DYING, Elisabeth Kubler Ross described trying to interview dying patients about death. When she discovered something odd. Sometimes people were sad, sometimes agitated, but she found that when one particular nurse had visited them, they seemed CALM, AT PEACE, EVEN PREPARED. She sought out the Nurse, asking what she had done?

The Nurse related: I just talk, telling them “You know, I had two babies of my own, die on my own lap. But God never abandoned me. I tell them that. I tell them they are not alone, God is with them and they do not need to be afraid.

Suddenly in the Book of Acts this dramatic story occurred. When the day of Pentecost had come, the Disciples were all together in the Upper Room with the door locked for fear. Suddenly a SOUND like the blowing of a Violent Wind came from Heaven and filled the whole house. They saw what appeared like flames of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. The simplistic interpretation has always been Fire = Passion.

Perhaps like Moses at the Bush, the flame represented the Holy Spirit that burned without burning up or burning out.

Perhaps like the comics which have a light bulb appear, this was a symbol of a bright idea of illumination.

But over and over again throughout the Bible, Faith in God is described like the forging of metal, which is not simply melted and cast in a mold, but under the heat of fire and stress of the Blacksmith's hammer is folded and refolded, welded into something far stronger. So quite possibly the fire of the Holy Spirit upon each, signified their hearts/souls/minds were ignited from stumbling disciples into committed apostles of tempered steel.

So we return to the CONTEXT, that in Jerusalem there were devout Jews from every Nation, who had gathered for the celebration of pledging our Offerings of First Fruits and the Greatest Gift to Judaism, The Torah, the 10 Commandments. When suddenly the Holy Spirit conferred upon the Disciples a new Gift. No longer are you Disciples of Jesus/You are APOSTLES; No longer are you Mourning His Death; No Longer People Surprised by the Resurrection; No Longer a People in Fear locked in an Upper Room/ YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN THE HOLY SPIRIT!

And the Apostles came out into the Street, where there were devout believers from every City and Province, learned Rabbis, who heard them speaking in their own languages.

On the One Hand this GIFT is an Answer to The Tower of Babel. In the Genesis Story of Babel, All the people tried to settle, they tried to build towers to reach heaven to make themselves like God, but God frustrated them with the gift of languages. NOW through the Holy Spirit, GOD has given the Apostles of Jesus the ability to bring together tall those who were divided!

But there were two sets of responses.

SOME questioned “ARE NOT ALL THESE GALILEANS?” Jerusalem at the time was a major City, Rome was a Major City. Galilee was considered uneducated uncouth hicks. This is not only racial and cultural prejudice, these learned devout believers were questioning where did these stupid people get all

this? Remember Nathaniel questioning before ever meeting Jesus, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth in Galilee?" But they heard the Apostles speaking in their languages, telling of the glories of God!

There were also those who insulted them saying "They are Three Sheets to the WIND!" To which PETER replies, "It is only 9 o'clock in the morning, they are not drunk, these are fulfillment of the Prophecy of JOEL. Your Young shall see visions, your elders shall dream dreams!

Years ago, I heard a story from a pastor who had two young children. On the Day of Pentecost, the children were sitting beside their mother, scribbling on their bulletins; when as the preacher described the sound of a Mighty Wind, suddenly a member of the church cued up on Youtube the sounds of a Hurricane. The children and visitors all began to look around. When the story described tongues of fire distributed and landing on each, there were people in their pews who had red pom poms hidden in their purses and pockets, who began whirling these about their heads. As the story described people from other places hearing the Apostles speaking in other tongues, people in the church from Africa and Other nations began chanting in their native tongues. At this point the children were standing on their pews looking around for where the sounds were coming from and what would happen next. As the Preacher said "Could we all join in singing "Breathe On me Breath of God fill me with life anew." Suddenly a man in the balcony laughed rudely and raucously called out "They must be drunk with new wine!" The children could hardly contain themselves, when the Girl said to her mother "NOW THAT WAS REALLY CHURCH!"