

DELAWARE-MARYLAND SYNOD  
2011 SYNOD ASSEMBLY

June 4, 2011  
Easter 7

Acts 1 : 6 – 14  
John 17 : 1 – 11

Waiting for the Spirit

**Do any of you remember the Synod Assembly in 2006??**

**It was my first assembly in this synod.  
I had just begun to serve as a part-time interim mission  
director of what was then called the Division for Outreach,  
and this was my first assembly in that new role.**

**We were in Gettysburg that year,  
and if you remember Gettysburg,  
you'll remember that we were always a bit cramped there at  
the Eisenhower Conference Center.**

**Unlike this amazing facility, the Eisenhower was on the small  
side for a convention of our size.  
Feeding the hundreds of voting members and visitors was  
especially difficult because the place didn't have a central  
dining facility.**

**So that year, the Eisenhower had us in the Arena, a huge  
exhibition hall next door. Remember that?  
The hall wasn't like this room here, it had the feel of an  
airplane hangar and was a semi-permanent structure that  
looked more like a huge tent than anything else.**

**Well, that year, the assembly was in June, as usual, and that  
weekend, it was beastly hot ... and the air conditioning in the**

**Arena was not turned on, I suppose because it was so early in the season.**

**So imagine this scene:**

**500 people or so, lined up in front of huge serving tables to get their lunch (soup and sandwiches, if I remember right) all sweating profusely in the 98 degree early summer heat.**

**It was ... oppressive, to say the least ...**

**But then, all of a sudden, quite unexpectedly, there was this huge noise.**

**A bang, kind of,  
the sounds of electric motors springing to life,  
gears turning and blowers turning on,  
then a swooshing sound as though from rushing air.  
Every head turned upward,  
everyone pointed to the ceiling ..**

**swoosh ...**

**there, the huge air conditioning hoses that had hung limp in the stifling heat all of a sudden came to life ...**

**cool air rushing in,  
you could follow the air as it traveled around the hall  
you could see the hoses inflate like a giant balloon ...**

**and you could feel the cool air descending on you, bringing relief.**

**aahhh ...**

**this was the Pentecost moment ...**

**unexpected ... delightful ... invigorating ...  
the moment when the cool refreshing air rushed in to bring  
relief on a sweltering summer's day**

**just like the Pentecost moment in Jerusalem that hot day  
when the Holy Spirit rushed in ...  
unexpected ... delightful ... bringing new vigor to the 120 or  
so disciples that made up the church,  
bringing clarity of purpose and power from above.**

**Ahh, but it's not Pentecost quite yet.**

**What's this preacher doing, you'll say,  
preaching a Pentecost sermon when the seventh Sunday of  
Easter is still to come,  
he's jumping the gun.**

**Well, okay, so I am ... but so is Jesus when he speaks to his  
disciples in this version of the Ascension in Luke-Acts.**

**You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon  
you, Jesus tells the disciples,  
and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all of Judea  
and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.**

**You will receive power, Jesus promises,  
you will receive power from above,  
you will have your Pentecost moment ... and soon.**

**Don't you just hate it when you have to preach on a text and  
the text starts with the wrong verse?**

**In verse 5, right before our text this morning starts, in verse 5  
Jesus says to his disciples:**

**“John baptized you with water but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”**

**That’s right, not many days from now.**

**Pentecost is almost here.**

**Pentecost is on its way.**

**Pentecost is right around the corner.**

**Can I have an Amen to that?**

**You will receive power, Jesus promises ... soon!!**

**In the meantime, Jesus tells them,  
go back to the city, stay in Jerusalem, wait for the Spirit ...  
and that is precisely what the disciples do.**

**When Jesus has disappeared from their sight,  
when Jesus has been taken up into heaven,  
they return to Jerusalem and gather once more in the upper  
room ... waiting, praying, preparing, getting ready for the  
Pentecost moment that is to come.**

**For JoAnna Patterson, that Pentecost moment will come  
again in just a few minutes when we invoke that same spirit  
and joyfully ordain her into the ministry of Word and  
Sacrament.**

**JoAnna, too, will once again receive the power that comes  
from above,  
the same power she was given in her baptism,  
the same power she affirmed in her confirmation,  
the same power that has been with her every day in her life  
as a child of God.**

**JoAnna, too, has been waiting, and praying, and preparing through four long years in the wilderness we call seminary ...**

**just as Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas and Bartholomew and Matthew, the other James and Simon and the second Judas ... just as they have been waiting and praying and hoping and preparing, huddling in the upper room in Jerusalem.**

**And so it is for us, brothers and sisters, so it is for us.**

**We, too, huddle inside a church that is under attack from all sides:**

**The world is in chaos,  
the nation is at war three times over,  
the ranks of the unemployed have swelled to frightening proportions,  
people are holding on by their fingernails to a way of life that they know is unsustainable,  
the young people stay away in droves making the church less and less relevant by the day while church leaders and members fret about the budget and bicker over social issues ...**

**and on top of all that, the roof over our sanctuary has sprung another leak and the boiler groans like it's going to explode any day now ... oh, and yeah, Pastor, the offering is down again this Sunday!**

**We are huddled inside a dying institution as the disciples were huddled in the upper room ... and like them, we wait for the liberating power of God's spirit to come and make us alive ... again.**

**But notice, their waiting, the disciple's waiting, it is not a passive waiting ... it is, rather, a scene rife with expectation.**

**See, the Acts of the Apostles begin where the Gospel of Luke leaves off: with grandiose expectations of what is to come.**

**You are witnesses, Jesus says to the disciples at the end of Luke's Gospel (Luke 24 : 48-49), I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.**

**See, Jesus' ascension does not mean that Jesus has left the building and the story has come to an end.**

**See, Jesus' return to the Father does not put Jesus out of play until the end of all things, as Matt Skinner of Luther Seminary has put it,**

**it is not the end of the story ... rather, it is the beginning.**

**Jesus is the one sent by God to bring God's liberating word to all the world.**

**Jesus has been sent to bear witness to the Father, he tells us so himself in what we call the high priestly prayer in John 17.**

**Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth,**

**and in this prayer, Jesus recounts how he has shared God's words with his disciples:**

**For the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them, and know in truth that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.**

**It is not the end of the story ... it is the beginning.**

**See, the disciples are waiting in the upper room until the Holy Spirit comes to set them free and send them into action**

**...**

**We don't have that excuse!!**

**For us, the Holy Spirit HAS come,  
Jesus HAS died for us,  
God HAS set us free for action in a kingdom that is yet to come but has already begun in the here and now.  
AMEN?**

**We have had our Pentecost moment ... not just in that stifling hot room in Gettysburg five years ago,**

**we have our Pentecost moment every Sunday  
Amen?**

**we have our Pentecost moment  
every time we gather at that font and eat at this table.  
You sure can say Amen to that!**

**See, Jesus has died for us and God has raised him from the dead ... and as a consequence, we have been clothed with power from above to be his witnesses beginning in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, to the ends of the earth ... and yes, that means Maryland and Delaware, too, beginning in Ocean City, in Delmarva and on the Eastern Shore, from Baltimore to Boonsboro and all the way to Frostburg.**

**Turn to your neighbor and say: We are his witnesses!!**

**That's what stewardship is all about.**

**Stewardship, you see, isn't just about our money and what we do with it.**

**Stewardship is about who we are as the people of God.**

**Stewardship is about WHOSE we are as followers of Jesus and how we use the many gifts God has given us for the sake of his kingdom.**

**Stewardship is about making the kingdom a reality in the here and now.**

**Turn to your neighbor and say: We are stewards of God's gifts.**

**Stewardship expresses what we have experienced in our Pentecost moment:**

**God's love, demonstrated in the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ,  
poured out for us and the world,  
a love we give witness to in all that we do and say as stewards of God's gifts and disciples of Jesus Christ.**

**God's Work. Our Hands: Stewards of God's Good Creation.**

**And that, brothers and sisters, is the Good News for you today, and to that, let the people of God say: AMEN.**