

“From the Few to the Many”

They were together in one place, all 120 of them. They had not yet signed incorporation papers. They had not yet written a constitution and by-laws, nor decided how to organize themselves or draw lines of accountability. They had not even had not even come up with a name for their loosely organized fellowship.

They called themselves, believers. They were together in one place because that is what they had been told to do. They were to stay put until “something” happened, the precise nature of which was not disclosed. He said the promise of the Father was coming along with a new wardrobe. “*You will be clothed with power from on high,*” is what he said. His disciples were there, and so were those who heard the call and followed Jesus to this moment.

The last words he spoke before he disappeared into the clouds were, “You are my witnesses... “ While they stood gawking at the sky, two men in white (Perhaps the same two who were at Jesus’ tomb?), appeared and told them they would get stiff necks if they didn’t stop looking up. As they were talking about what to do now that Jesus was gone, a stiff breeze kicked up, blowing dust down the streets and billowing curtains. In the distance, they heard the roar of wind.

Before we continue the story, let’s think about something we take for granted. Watching Sue start and end each day with a deep breath from an inhaler makes me grateful I don’t have to struggle to breathe. Unless you have asthma or some other respiratory problem, you don’t think about this *involuntary miracle* that keeps you alive.

Did you know you are breathing used air? The atmosphere surrounding our earth protects from the deep, cold vacuum of space, and no air has ever escaped it. The atmosphere has no state-of-the-art ventilation system that draws in fresh air and expels the bad. The air that encircles the earth is billions of years old, which means we breathe the same air the dinosaurs breathed. It explains why some of us have Brontosaurus breath. We inhale the air breathed by Leonardo DeVinci, Albert Einstein, Al Switzer, and Al Capone. We have breathed the air of George Washington, George Burns, Mother Teresa, and Brother Lawrence.

Someone said, “Every time we breathe we take in what was once *a baby’s first breath, or some dying person’s last.* We take it in, we use it to live, and when we breathe out it carries some of us with it into the next person, tree, or lizard.”

Barbara Brown Taylor says that when Jesus let go of his last breath, for the love of us -- “that breath hovered in the air in front of him for a moment and then it was set loose on earth...it was so full of passion and life that it didn’t dissipate. It grew in strength and volume until it was a mighty wind.” (*Home By Another Way*, p. 143)

I am one of those people who like to sit outside and watch thunderstorms coming. I’m fascinated by the cloud formations swirling in the sky. Its quiet until the leading edge approaches. Large trees in the distance are whipped and bent like reeds by the advancing wall of wind. The blast of cold wind hits and you’re knocked off balance by the power of it. It exhilarating. It is fearsome.

Those of you who are fans of Garrison Keillor’s public radio program, *The Prairie Home Companion*, know the commercial for *Powder Milk Biscuits*. After the singing stops Keillor ends the commercial saying: “Powder Milk Biscuits: Heavens! They’re tasty and expeditious. They’re made from whole wheat, to give shy persons the strength to get up and do what needs to be done.”

Pentecost is God's gift to the church so we will have the life, the breath, and the strength to get up and do what God needs to have done. The Spirit did not descend at Pentecost to give us some subjective feeling of oneness with the Creator. The Spirit didn't blow through the upper room to give us peace, happiness or faith. Free of doubt.

The breath of Jesus descended on Pentecost so sons and daughters and young and old will prophesy and not be pacified. It blew like a gale and sent sensibilities flying every which way. It did something amazing to the disciples. They grew spines and nerves of steel. Timid people suddenly got "uppity" and announced the promises God being fulfilled before everyone's eyes. The crowd that gathered heard different languages spoken and understood in their own tongue. They were shocked when they saw who was doing the talking. "You mean to tell us these prophesiers are Galilean's?" In our language we would ask, "Who told the hillbillies they could preach?" The "hicks from the sticks" spoke eloquently and passionately about the great things God was going to do.

Up until this time, the Holy Spirit was dispensed in individual does. Jesus received it at his baptism. He said the Spirit was upon him to preach good news. It landed on him again when he was transfigured on the mountaintop. But at Pentecost every believer got a shot of Spirit -- not just the people with degrees and credentials, but the simple, everyday people with no credentials to boast of or great smarts to rely on -- they all praised God in languages everyone could understand.

I was working in my office a couple of weeks ago when someone rang the intercom at the front door. "*Can I help you?*" I asked. He was a good-looking young man who seemed to be maybe 22 or 24 years old. His hair was a little long. He wore a Concord soccer shirt, athletic shorts and flip-flops. He also wore good-smelling cologne. He wanted to know who to contact for permission to put up a sign where ours had been at the corner of CR 26 and 113.

“What are you promoting?” I asked. “My church is interested in starting a day care program.” “That’s great,” I replied. “Where’s your church?” “We’re the new one across the road. I guess that makes us neighbors,” he said. “Who’s your pastor?” I asked. “I am,” he replied. Suddenly, I felt very old. “Maybe I’ll feel better if I quiz him on his credentials and education degrees,” I thought. I decided I’m too young to get that crotchety.

He said his church has a passion for ministries with children. “We started a Day Care in our Goshen church. The first year we only had ten. Now we’re up to fifty. Now we want to get another one started here.” I asked if his church did all the staffing. I knew the answer as soon as I asked it. “All our staff belong to the church,” he said. “By July we should have enough to open a facility here.”

As he drove away I said to myself, “Poor kid. He hasn’t learned what he can’t do.” How does his church devote itself to passion when it’s supposed to spend its energies on keeping the church financially afloat? Passion? It isn’t an option for a church that’s worn out defending itself from the Holy Spirit. How does he expect busy people to find the time to tackle something ambitious? Does he challenge them to reorder their priorities and trust God will give what’s necessary to make dreams work? I feel sorry for him. He’s too young to know it will never work.

Just then a strong wind streak came down CR 113. It swirled all across the road and I heard a big commotion. Next I saw an odd meteorological phenomenon. It must have been sunlight creating a prism effect. But for a moment I swear I saw fire dancing above his church.