

Proclaim the message!

Acts 2:1-18

January 15, 2006

Jesus told them to wait ... and so they did.

Wait ... Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait.

Be still ... Be still, says the Lord, and know that I am God!

But we are impatient. We have places to go and things to do and people to see!

Be still!

I need to get to work. I need to get to school. I need to get to volleyball practice. I need to get to the doctor. I need to work out more. I need to get out more. I just need to finish this.

Be still!

Even when we have nothing to do, we have to have something to do. We turn on the TV. We turn on the radio. We turn on the CD player. We check the newspaper. We check our mail. We check our e-mail. We surf the web. We IM our pals. We chat on the cell.

Be still!

But I might miss something!

Be still!

But I might fall behind!

Be still!

I can't afford to waste any time!

Be still!

Listen to me! I'm old! I don't have that much time!

Be still!

Be still and wait. Wait for the gift God has promised.

Suddenly there was a noise from the sky, a noise like a strong wind blowing, and they saw what looked like tongues of fire spreading everywhere and touching each person in the room, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit came upon them. God's Spirit touched them and filled them and they began to speak.

What would it have been like to be there? What would it have been like to be one of the men, one of the women, gathered in that house on the Day of Pentecost? If you had been there that day, would you have been terrified? Exhilarated? Both? Neither?

Maybe neither. Maybe you would have been so caught up in the experience itself that you would not be conscious of anything else but the presence of God's Spirit, not self-conscious at all, not aware of any of your own feelings, but only aware of God!

Be still and know that I am God!

What would it have been like? What is it like? Does the Spirit still come? Does the Spirit still touch people and fill people?

Their experience of the Holy Spirit was palpable, visceral. Certainly it was an experience that stretched the limits of their perception and their imagination. Certainly it was an experience full of mystery. The account in Acts doesn't say the Spirit came as wind and fire. It says the believers that were gathered together heard something that sounded like a strong wind blowing. They saw something that looked like tongues of fire touching everyone. Nevertheless, their experience was visceral, palpable. They saw something. They heard something. And they undoubtedly felt something.

What do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel? Do you feel the wind of the Spirit blowing on you, in you, through you? Do you feel the Spirit's warmth bringing you comfort? Do you feel the Spirit's fire stirring your passions? Do you?

It's not an easy question to answer, is it? I have not had visions. I have not heard voices. I have not felt the touch of an unseen hand on my arm. And yet ... And yet, there are times when I do feel filled with the presence of Someone, filled with the presence of Someone, that has not come from within me.

This is what I believe! This is the thrust of the entire gospel, that we encounter the living God not in any kind of "out-of-body" experience, not in any kind of "supernatural" event, not in "heaven," not anywhere else, but here. We encounter the living God when God comes to us, when God comes here, and our encounter with the living God is very much an "in-this-body" experience. The Holy Spirit is Emmanuel, God-with-us, God touching our lives in tangible, visceral, palpable ways, God making a difference in our lives here and now.

So Pentecost is important. Pentecost is a sign. Maybe we don't need signs anymore, or maybe we miss them when they come. But, in any case, the reality to which the sign points is what matters: the real presence of the Spirit of God coming to us, touching us, filling us.

And when the Holy Spirit fills us, we have something to say. We have something to say! We have a message to proclaim! It is God's message, a message about the great things God has done.

I will pour out my Spirit, God says, on men and on women, and they will proclaim my message.

They did proclaim God's message, those men and women gathered in Jerusalem.

They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to talk in other languages, as the Spirit enabled them to speak.

They spoke Parthian, Phrygian, Aramaic, and Greek. The crowd that had gathered around the believers all heard them speaking in their own native languages. It was surely a babble of voices, but the voices weren't babbling! They spoke clearly, understandably, to those who had come from every country in the known world, telling them of the great things God had done!

The Spirit of God does not give us the message. We speak of the things we have seen, we speak of the things we have heard. We witness to our own experience of God in our lives. The Spirit of God doesn't give us the message, rather the Spirit of God gives us the power and courage and art to proclaim it.

We have something to say. In an age when violence and hatred and greed and fear often leave humanity speechless and hopeless, we have something to say. We proclaim the message, God's message, a message of unconditional love, of undying hope, of astounding mercy and amazing grace, a message of forgiveness and reconciliation and lasting peace. May God's Spirit fill us and empower us and embolden us to proclaim the message!